H. E. BATES

argosy

THE SHORT STORY MAGAZINE

W. Somerset Maugham

John Wain

C. S. Forester

Youngman Carter

Arthur Gordon

JANUARY – 2/6

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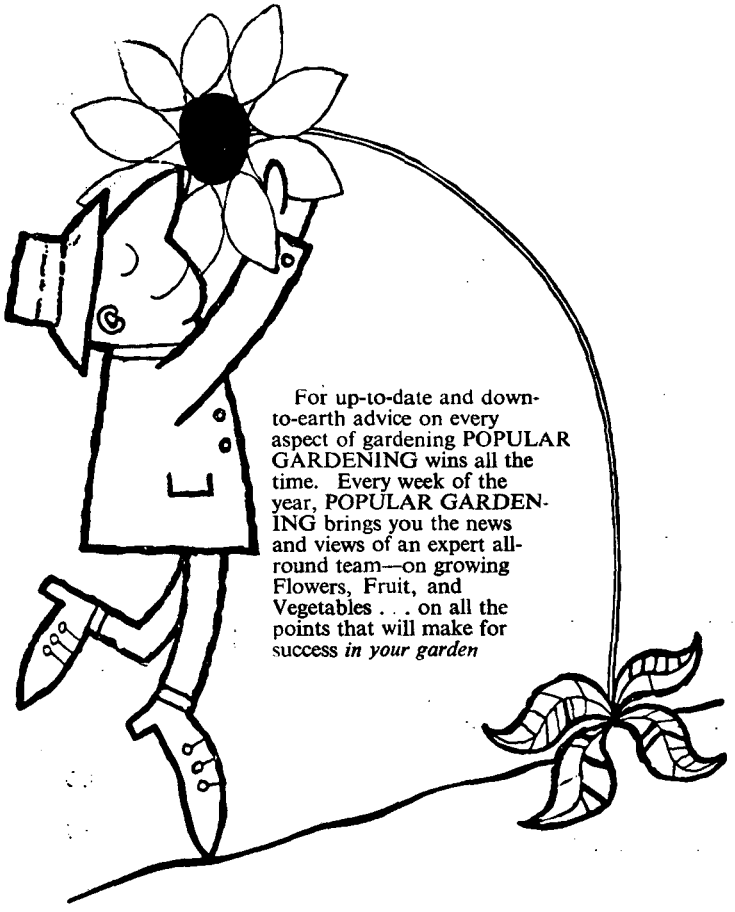

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ARGOSY

A Fleetway magazine

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Log Book

SELECTING Christmas gifts for office colleagues is always a slightly tricky process, as the peace and harmony of the whole ensuing year may hinge on it. Invariably we plan to do our choosing well in advance, slowly, methodically, really suiting the gift to the recipient, and invariably the third week in December finds us in a frenzy, buying up the same old bathsalts, ties, cigarettes, and boxes of chocolates.

Invariably? No no, this year we shall be triumphantly able to look our colleagues in the eye as we unwrap *their* well-chosen presents; this year we have made full use of those Fireside Market, Shopcat, Talking Shop features which take up more and more magazine pages as the festive season swings nearer.

Firstly, the Director, bless him. No more cigars or candied cherries—this year he's getting a Quick-Use Oxygen Unit. It's wonderful in cases of headaches, fatigue, air-sickness, car-sickness, drowning, or electric shock, the advertisement said, and since he has been known to suffer from the first two, and fate might at any time step in with one of the last four, it's tailor-made for him. Fits desk, briefcase, or glove compartment, and the price most reasonable.

Next the Editor. We toyed with the notion of a Leg Wallet, or a Sportsman's hunting-knife complete with fish-scaler, or a rifle that floats in water, but finally settled for a pedometer. "You'll be shocked to discover how much leg-work you put in," the ad. said. With any luck this useful gadget will keep him at his desk and cut down on those manic pacings about the office so reminiscent of Sherlock Holmes working up for a violin-playing jag.

The Chief Sub on Argosy, that long-suffering character, is getting from us—after we had dismissed a pair of height-

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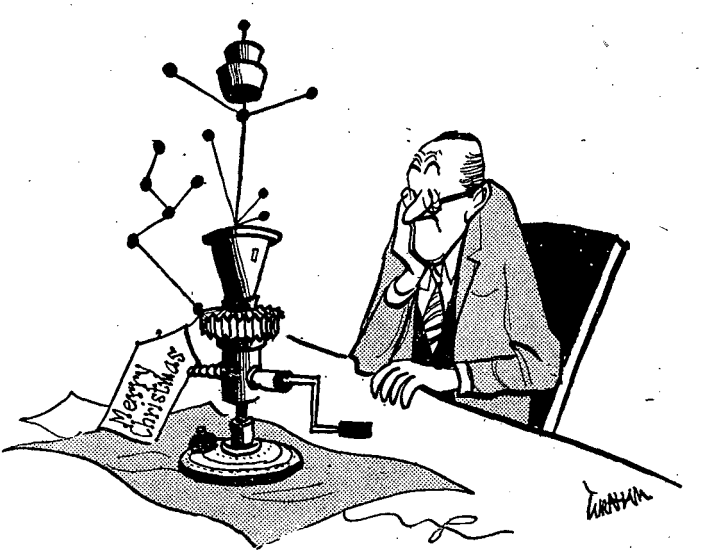
increasing shoes and a Concealed Bar Cabinet—he is getting a mechanical rain sprinkler. This device does not sprinkle rain, as you might think, but seizes it as it rushes from your roof-gutters and carries it away to a safe distance. We felt it would adapt admirably to office usage.

Our much-loved secretary was very nearly given a Moonshine Liquor Still, or an antique French telephone rewired to make a talking-point on her desk, but in the end we gave her a keyring alarm guaranteed to go off in her handbag every half-hour. It'll be laughs all the way in the Argosy offices from now on.

Mrs. Vacuum, who makes our tea, and dusts our typewriters every New Year's Eve, will get an LP record of Progressive Bongo instruction, just the job for her and the cool office cat. And what about Old Uncle Horatio? For him—after we'd regretfully written off a card-game called Peek-a-Boo and a preparation guaranteed to end grey hair (but it didn't say how) we selected a black sateen Sleep Shade and pair of Easirest ear plugs to ensure peace and good relations throughout the office day.

We can't wait to see what our dear colleagues have chosen for us this year. It's small, flat, rectangular, and pocket-size; can it be that they have donated a copy of A*g*s*?

John Wain, born in 1925 in Stoke on Trent, was the first of the 'fifties novelists to launch off into the angry, funny, picaresque



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school of writing. His novel *Hurry on Down*, which came out a year before Amis' *Lucky Jim*, started a series of reckless, feckless young heroes on their way and inaugurated what came to be known as " the Movement." Since then Wain has written four novels, volumes of poems and criticism, and a short-story collection, *Nuncle and Other Stories*. He is a frequent radio and TV broadcaster and writes regularly for one Sunday and several weekly papers. His hobbies, when he has time to indulge them, are motor-cycling and walking.

Peter Paterson, whose unusual story about curling appears on page 13, lives in a road called, believe it or not, Lacrosse Terrace. (In Scotland, of course, where they love hitting balls with sticks.) Apart from an interlude with SHAEF he has spent his time in the bleaching and dyeing trade. Leisure is occupied with writing. If he had his life to live again he says he would be a shepherd.

American writer **Arthur Gordon** spent part of his war with the British R.A.F. in Europe—where he found the background for the story on the opposite page.

Demands for **W. Somerset Maugham** reprints are perennial and we're delighted to bring back, by popular demand, one of his favourite stories. Best wishes to the Grand Master for 1961.

JOHN SILVER

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It was Charles Morgan who said that miracles were more natural, not less—and those of Francis of Assisi come to us across the centuries happily and naturally as the songs of birds.

MIRACLE AT GRECCIO

by ARTHUR GORDON

MORE than seven hundred years ago, so the legend goes, in the little village of Greccio in Italy, there lived a man who was at war with God. This was strange, because it was an age of burning faith. All over Europe great Gothic cathedrals were rising, and men were banding together to go on crusades. But to the woodcarver of Greccio, cathedrals were a mockery and crusaders were deluded men.

His name was Luigi, and he had his reasons. He was a strong man in his early thirties, black-eyed, hot-tempered, with wonderful sensitive hands. From childhood he had had the gift of shaping wood into marvellous imitations of life. And for a long time he accepted this talent with gratitude, as a sign of God's favour.

For the greater part of his life, indeed, Luigi was a devout man. The bas relief of the Last Supper above the church door in Greccio was his work; so was the beautiful and intricate altar screen. But the day came when Luigi spat upon the ground in front of the church and brandished his fist against Heaven. It was the day that he learnt his daughter—his only child—was blind.

She had seemed perfect when she was born: blonde and blue-eyed like her mother, who was from Lombardy. But as the days went by, it became apparent that something was wrong. And when it was certain that the child would never see the light of day, then—the villagers said—the woodcarver of Greccio seemed to go mad.

He went no more to the little church on the hill. He refused

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to allow prayers in his house. He had been carving a Madonna for the Archbishop himself; he threw it into the fire. His child had been called Maria, after the Queen of Heaven. He changed her name to Rosa.

His wife pleaded in vain; nothing could move him. "Go to church if you like," he told her. "Pray your useless prayers. I will have nothing to do with a God who condemns innocent children to darkness. It is better to believe in no God than in such a God as that."

In his dealings with people, he became sombre and forbidding. His voice was harsh and there was fury in his face. His work was still in demand, for his talent seemed greater than ever. But he would do secular work only. "I have no further interest," he would say grimly, "in the so-called glory of God!"

Only with his little blind girl did he show patience and tenderness. He brought her kittens and puppies, for she loved animals. The villagers grew accustomed to seeing them together—the dark-browed man and the golden-haired child. And the child laughed often, but the man never smiled. To an artist, blindness is like a sentence of death.

Thus the years passed.

Then in mid December, in the year 1207, a mule train came through Greccio carrying rich merchandise from the far corners of the earth. Among the treasures on display was a magnificent piece of ivory, thick as a man's thigh. As soon as he saw it, the thought came to Luigi that he would carve it into a doll—a bambino—for his little girl. For although he no longer cared about Christmas, there was nothing that he would not have given his afflicted child.

So with secrecy and haste he bought the ivory and took it home to his workshop. It was unfamiliar material, but the genius in Luigi's chisel was more than equal to it. In three days it was finished, the most perfect image of a newborn baby that could be imagined.

Life-sized, smiling, with tiny arms outstretched, the ivory bambino seemed almost to breathe. Looking upon his work, he knew that it was good.

Luigi knew, too, that Rosa would love it, for the child had sensitive fingers like her father. And these fingers had become her eyes.

Luigi wrapped the ivory image in a cloth and put it on a shelf. He told no one about it except his wife, and he told her only because he wanted her to make some clothes for the doll.

But even if he had let the secret of the bambino be known, it would have caused no great stir, for the interest of the villagers

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was centred elsewhere. The talk in the market place, on the street corners, even in the taverns revolved round just one thing: the young friar who had come to Greccio from a neighbouring town to preach in the little church.

No two descriptions of this young friar were quite the same. Some people remembered only his gentle voice, others his eyes, others his pale, graceful hands. No one could say exactly what it was about his preaching, either, but people who heard him came away with an extraordinary sense of peace, of stillness, as if all the anger and bitterness and pain of living had been lifted from their hearts.

Luigi's wife heard the young friar preach, and she begged her husband to come to the church with her. Just once, she pleaded, only once. It could do no harm, could it? And it might—it just might—rekindle a spark of the faith he had once had in God.

But Luigi shook his head. "When this God of yours shows me that he can cure blindness, then I will believe in him. But not before."

Luigi's wife bowed her head. "May I take Rosa with me to hear him, then?"

"No," said Luigi harshly, "no! And speak no more of this!"

He knew his wife would not dare to disobey him, nor did she. But she wanted desperately to bring her child into some contact, however slight, with the love and warmth that seemed to flow from the young friar. And on Christmas Eve, suddenly, she thought of a way.

Luigi might never have known—he paid little attention to his wife's comings and goings. But by chance he went into his workshop and glanced at the shelf and saw that the ivory bambino was gone.

His shout of fury brought the servants running. From a terrified maid, Luigi learnt that his wife had taken the ivory image to the church to have it blessed.

When an artist has created something, it is no longer merely an object, it is an extension of himself. Out into the street stalked Luigi, black anger in his heart. Up the hill through the pale December sunlight towards the little church. But before he could reach the door, a cavalcade swept up the hill behind him.

With a clatter of hoofs and a spatter of mud they passed him, three young nobles, richly dressed, on foam-streaked horses, then half a dozen mounted servants, and finally two carts loaded with farm animals: sheep, goats, oxen, a donkey . . .

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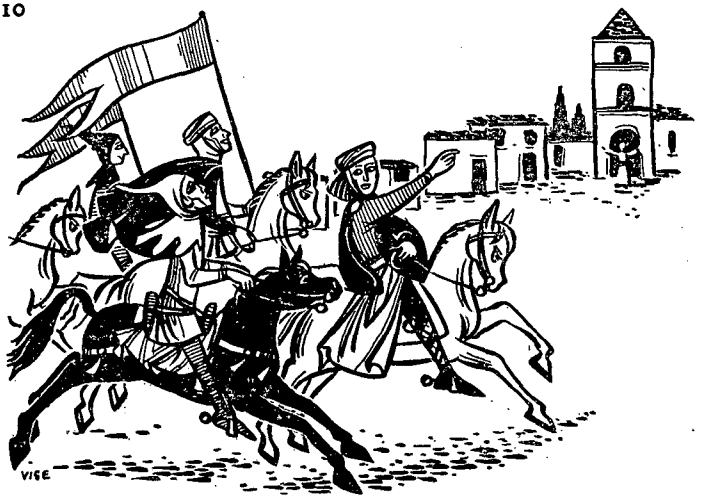

The riders pulled up at the church door with a chorus of shouts. A young man in a purple cloak took a long drink from a silver flask, tossed it to one of his companions, and sprang down from his horse. "Francesco," he shouted, "Francesco Bernardone! We got your message and we are here. Where are you?"

The others dismounted and stood swaying and laughing. It seemed to Luigi that the young aristocrats were rather drunk. He came up behind one of the servants and put a heavy hand on his shoulder. "Whence come you, fellow?" he asked roughly. The man winced under the woodcarver's grip. "From Assisi, signor."

"And who is this Francesco Bernardone that you seek here in Greccio?"

The servant pointed. "That is he—the friar!"

The church door had opened, and a slender, brown-clad figure had come out. His cowl was thrown back; the late sunlight fell upon his fine-boned face. "Welcome, my friends," he said, smiling. "And God's peace be upon you all."

The young man in the purple cloak swept his arm in a theatrical gesture. "We've brought the animals, just as you said. But, Francesco, how much longer are you going to play this farce? Assisi isn't the same without you. The ladies miss you, too!"

"I have but one lady now," the friar said. "Her name is Poverty. That's why I had to ask you to bring the animals. I knew you wouldn't fail me."

Luigi tightened his hold on the servant's shoulder.

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"Who is this man?"

The servant shrugged despairingly. "In Assisi, until not long ago, he was my master's friend and drinking companion. Now, they say, he preaches the word of God. It is very strange."

Other servants were unloading the carts, where the frightened animals reared and plunged. "A moment, please," the friar said. He walked over to the nearest cart and laid his hand on the donkey's back. "Be calm, there, Brother Ass. There is no reason to be frightened. And you, Sister Sheep, do not baa so pitifully. No one is going to hurt you."

He stepped back and nodded to the servants. "Lift them down gently. They will follow me, I think." And even as he spoke, the animals grew calm and still.

A hush seemed to fall upon the people, too, the riders from Assisi and the villagers who had gathered. In this sudden quiet, the friar said to the young man in the purple cloak, "Come into the church, Lorenzo. I want to show you my praesepe—my manger."

The young man said, in a low voice, "I am not a true believer, Francesco. You know that well."

"All the more reason for coming," the friar said.

He turned and went back into the church, and all the animals followed him, and the people too. Even Luigi followed, because he could not help it.

Inside the church, candles burnt dimly and the odour of sandalwood hung in the air. Near the altar was a rude shelter made of green boughs, and in the shelter was a manger. From where he stood, Luigi could not see into the manger, but he knew what it contained, for a woman was kneeling near it, her face beautiful in the candlelight. The woman was his wife, and when she saw him watching her, her face grew even more beautiful.

Without being led, without being driven, the animals grouped themselves round the manger and grew very still. Then the friar stood up on the steps of the altar. "I was going to read you the Christmas story from the gospel," he said. "But my praesepe—my nativity scene—makes me so happy, and my heart is so full, that I am going to sing it to you."

Standing there before the altar, he began to sing, and no one who heard it ever forgot the sweetness of his song. He told the ageless story of the angels and the shepherds, of the coming of the Wise Men who brought gifts to the Babe in the Manger. He sang it from beginning to end, and no one moved, no one stirred.

Even the animals seemed to be listening, as if they too could understand the words. And Luigi was prepared to believe that they could, because an even greater miracle was taking place

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within himself. A strange peace had come upon him, and the bitterness and the anger were gone from his heart.

Nor was his the only heart that was being changed, for when at last the music melted into silence, the young man in the purple cloak moved forward. From round his neck he took a chain of gold, and he knelt down and put it beside the manger. And after him his companions came and put down gifts, one a ring, the other a jewelled dagger.

Luigi felt a touch on his arm. Looking round, he saw the friar smiling at him. "You wondered if God could cure blindness," the friar said. "Well, we are watching Him do it, are we not?"

Luigi did not answer, for there was a tightness in his throat. He could see the villagers crowding forward to look into the manger, and the awe and wonder in their faces as they gazed upon his handiwork. Afterwards, there were those who swore that the ivory bambino stirred and smiled. But this was the flickering candlelight, no doubt.

Then the friar said, "Please thank your daughter for her bambino. And now you may take it back to her."

Luigi shook his head. "The bambino is where it belongs. Let it stay."

The friar said, "Tomorrow is Christmas. Your little girl would be disappointed."

"No," said Luigi. "I will make her another bambino. I will work all night. I will carve her a whole praesepe, just like yours, with the manger and the animals and the Wise Men. So that Ro— I mean, Maria, will have Christmas at her fingertips whenever she wants it."

"Yes," said the friar softly, "yes, that is what we all need: Christmas not just one day, but always."

So Luigi went home, leaving the ivory bambino behind. Hand in hand with his wife, he walked back down the hill. And he worked all night with gratitude in his heart because he knew that in his house blindness had indeed been cured—not his daughter's, but his own. And the praesepe he carved was a wondrous thing, and Maria kept it always . . .

That, then, was how the nativity scene first came to be re-enacted at Christmas time, and that was how the Christmas carol came to be sung. The melody that St. Francis sang has been lost—lost for centuries, now. But legend says that it was not so very different from the song the angels sang above the dark Galilean hills.

Who knows? It may be so.

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GRAND CURLING

I would fall asleep with the laughter of the skaters ringing in my ears

BY PETER PATERSON

THE moment I entered the kitchen of the croft house on my return from school I sensed that Grandmother was in an ill humour, and when I glanced at the shelf above the window I realised instantly its cause. One of the three sets of curling stones which habitually stood there was missing.

If Grandmother had had her way, the curling stones would not have been given house room, but they were perhaps Grandfather's dearest possession and he would not allow them to be banished to the dusty oblivion of the woodshed. At intervals he would take the stones down and polish them lovingly till they shone like marble. With them he had won the championship of the Carnock Curling Club on six consecutive occasions and time and time again had led his club to victory.

" Aye, he's away," Grandmother said, " Deil mind him and a' his cronies. He's away and half the jobs no' touched: the kye no' fed and the horse no' foddered. And the black calf's gotten out of the shed and is stravaigin Guid kens where. We'll need to find it and bring it in out of the weather. Bide a wee till I make up the fire and I'll gang with you."

It happened each time the ice was bearing, this metamorphosis of grown men and greybeards into eager boys without a stound of conscience playing truant from their homes, leaving their wives and families to do the tasks neglected, no thought in their heads but to tread the ice and send the curling stones zooming and booming up the measured loch.

Grandmother and I went searching among the ruins of the old castle, but there was no sign of the errant calf. Then suddenly Grandmother noticed that the door to the dungeon, which was usually fastened with a piece of rope, was standing open.

" I wouldna wonder but that the beast has teuged the rope loose," Grandmother said, and strode forward to investigate. From the deep-down gloom came the faint, frightened mooing of the calf. - " It maun have fallen down the stairs, laddie. Like as no' it'll have broken a leg."

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"I'll go down and find out," I said. The moment I stepped on the topmost stone of the stairs, my feet went from me and I slithered on my bottom down the whole flight and finished up sprawled across the calf, which was lying on its side on the floor.

"Guid preserve us!" I heard Grandmother exclaim. "Are you killed, laddie?"

"I'm all right," I assured her. "Don't you come down; the stairs are sheeted with ice."

"I'll get a puckle straw. Bide there; I'll be back in a jiffy."

The calf was struggling desperately to get to its feet, but the floor was ice-covered and its every attempt ended in failure. I soothed it, put an arm about its neck, and gave it my fingers to suck.

I was familiar with the long wide oblong dungeon with its unsmoothed stone walls, for many a time I had come down with boys from the village, each of us carrying a candle stuck in the neck of a bottle to light our way. I never once entered it without feeling a sense of eeriness grip me; its gloom held always a furtive air, as if a convocation of ghosts had fled at our approach.

It seemed an eternity before Grandmother returned. She had a lantern and she scattered straw before her as she descended cautiously.

"Mercy on us, you might have broken ilka bone in your body," she exclaimed. "You're sure you're no' hurtit?"

"I'm as right as rain," I told her, as she helped me to my feet. "And the calf's no' hurt either, so far as I can make out."

With one hand round its neck and the other at its haunches, I encouraged the trembling calf to make the ascent. In a few minutes we were safely up and out into the cobbled courtyard.

Grandmother did not follow at my heels as I had expected, and I was becoming a little anxious for her safety when suddenly she appeared, rather breathless, at my side.

"I just had to bide and look about me," she apologised. "It's a weird and wonderful sicht down there, sic fantastic shapes of icicles I never saw afore; and the floor's like glass . . . Losh me, laddie, you're limping bad. You've hurtit yourself after a'."

I protested that it was nothing: just a wrenched ankle.

"It's a' the fault of your grandfather," Grandmother declared angrily. "Wait till I get my tongue on him. Curling daft! I hope with a' my heart he loses the championship this year."

When morning came I could not put my foot under me. It was late afternoon before the doctor drove up in his gig, and by that time, despite Grandmother's efforts to keep him thirled to the house, Grandfather had given her the slip and was away over the moor to the loch.

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The doctor had a companion with him who engaged Grandmother in animated conversation while the medico bounded upstairs to my room.

" Hard luck, making a lameter of yourself now when the loch's bearing," he observed. " You'll need to rest the foot for a while. I think we'll have to keep you in bed for a day or two."

At this my face fell. " I wanted to see Grandfather winning the championship for the seventh time," I said glumly.

The doctor smiled. " Well, the final won't be till Saturday at the earliest—if the frost holds. Just you content yourself in bed, and we'll see how you are when I call back in a day or two."

At the door he turned and observed, " By! Wouldn't your grandmother have been happy if it had been your grandfather and not you that had to bide under the blankets." He went downstairs chuckling. Grandmother's impatience with Grandfather's curling exploits was well known and she had many sympathisers among the womenfolk whose husbands were Grandfather's clubmates and cronies.

I could hear the pony stamping impatiently in the yard, but it was a good while before the doctor took his departure. There was a great discussion going on in the kitchen to the accompaniment of the clinking of teacups. I strained my ears but could not distinguish what was being said, although I recognised the voice of the doctor's companion: Sim Herries, the mole-catcher. Sim would be unable to carry on his business while the ground remained hard as granite. It was odd, I reflected, that he was not over at the loch, for he was a notable curler—then I remembered that there had been some difference of opinion at the last meeting of the committee and in a fit of pique Sim had resigned.

When eventually the two men took their leave, Grandmother went out into the yard with them. The window of my room was open, and now I could hear plainly enough what was said.

" Well, I can rely on you, Sim, to put the proposition to my friends downby," Grandmother said.

" Aye, mistress, you can that. I've nae doubt but what it will be welcomed; and I'll mak' siccar it's acted upon with speed and discretion."

" Aye," Grandmother said. " We'll need to be careful that nae word of it blaws on the wind in a certain direction."

" It's providential in a way that—" it was the doctor speaking.

He paused, and Grandmother put in immediately, " I understand, Doctor, I understand. When did you say you'd call?"

" I'll leave it till a week today. A week should be ample to see the project well forward. What say you, Sim?"

" Leave it to me," Sim said. " Just leave it to me."

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The conversation puzzled me, but I knew better than to question Grandmother regarding it.

When she came upstairs, I noticed that she was in particularly good humour. "A week in bed will no be long in passing," she consoled me. "You'll have time now to read the stories you got as prizes at the Sabbath school. They tell me yon *Kidnapped* is a humdinger."

"I wanted to see Grandfather win the championship for the seventh time," I said disconsolately.

"Och, that'll be no great miss. Anyway, if a' I hear's true, the laird's like to beat him. He was in Switzerland for the sports and put in a lot o' practice with the man that's champion out there. I'll no' be sorry if he gies your grandfather a good scuthcin."

"It would be a terrible disappointment to Grandfather."

"I'll no' shed any tears, the day he or the club gets scuppered. Faith no, laddie, you wait and you'll see. I vow I'll dance a jig that'll set the very hills fidgin."

The frost held; indeed, it seemed to take a stronger grip on the world. I felt cooped up like a prisoner, and try as I might I could not help regretting the fun I was missing, learning to skate, or playing "coorie-hunkers" on the ice with my schoolmates.

Give him his due, Grandfather did his best to cheer me up. After dinner each day, before he went off to the loch, he would relate all that had happened the previous day, how he had beaten this one and that one. It seemed inevitable that the laird and he would be the final contestants for the championship. He was supremely confident that he would emerge the victor. "What could a gomeril o' a Swiss teach the laird about curling?" he said disdainfully.

"I'd fair love to be there to see you beat him," I confessed.

"Och, weel, laddie, it canna be helped. Things maun ay be some way. You'll be up and out in time to see us play the Dun Geon Curling Club."

"I never heard of them afore," I said.

"No nor me either till this very week. They hail frae somewhere out Stirling way, I think."

"Bannockburn?" I suggested with a laugh.

"They put a challenge in the *County Advertiser*, no less, asking us to name a day. We couldna do ocht but take up their challenge. A week come Saturday, if the weather holds, will see them rue their presumption. Bannockburn, did you say? Boy, we'll gie them Flodden!"

Evening was the time I wearied most. Grandmother came up always about six o'clock to take away the tray and to settle

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me comfortably. "You'll no' be feared to bide a while in the house your lane? There's a wheen of jobs still to do in the byre and dairy, jobs that auld blackguard, your grandfather, should be attending to. You'll no' be eerie, kenning I'm no' far away."

I always assured her that I would be all right, but sometimes when I heard her go out, the door shut behind her, the silence and the emptiness of the old house would scare me and I would pull the bedclothes over my head. I would lie and picture the scene on the loch, with the moon, not yet at the full, rising above the wood through which a track wound up from the highway a mile beyond the village. I would fall asleep with the shouts of the curlers, the laughter of the skaters, ringing in my ears.

One night I woke up suddenly with the sound of voices still in my ears: but these, I was sure, were not imaginary voices. They seemed to come from no farther distance than the track from the croft house. A moment later they were gone, the silence of the house and the world so intense that I could hear the crackle of the frost, the movement of the cows in the byre.

Shortly afterwards Grandmother came in and stole upstairs, as I suspect she did every night, to assure herself that I was sound asleep. I told her of the voices I had heard outby.

"Voices! Och, you're havering, laddie. Settle down now."

I resolutely kept myself awake the following night. It would be about ten o'clock when I heard unmistakably the sound of excited, happy voices on the air. Presently the yard was filled with men who had walked across the moor from the loch carrying Grandfather shoulder high.

They invaded the kitchen, congratulating Grandmother on her spouse's remarkable achievement. From the tone of Grandmother's voice I could gather that she was declaring forcibly her own opinion of the feat and of the curling fraternity in general. It was not long till she got rid of the crowd. They went off in subdued mood, trekking quietly down the track to the village.

When she came upstairs later, Grandmother was plainly in a grim mood. "Dinna speak about the championship or your grandfather," she warned me. "Shoulder high they carried him, the conquering hero—aye, and just as well for him they did, for he'd never have made it on his ain twa legs, after a' the yill he maun have imbibed.

"He's down there moaning and groaning with a splitting headache the ae minute and the next he's boasting about the massacre they'll make of the Dun Geon Club boys, come Saturday. He's more full of himself than ever now—fair puffed up with pride. Maybe he'll no craw sae crouse a week the nicht . . ."

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" I'm glad he won," I said defiantly.

Grandmother looked for a moment as if she would warm my ears for my impudence. " Get to sleep," she ordered angrily, " and no' another word out of you."

The doctor called next morning and declared me fit to be out of bed. " You'll be in fine fettle by Saturday for the game with the Dun Geon Club. That's going to be worth seeing, mark my words."

That night, as Grandmother was happing me in bed, she stiffened suddenly and stood listening intently.

" That's no' rain I hear blattering? " she exclaimed, her face a study in amazement and what looked to me very like consternation. I listened and my own heart sank. It was rain all right, streaming against the window, hissing on the roof, chuckling in the gutters. The thaw had set in, I was to be denied the excitement and joy of watching the great match. It was unfair.

Grandmother shrugged her shoulders. " That's ay the way o't," she remarked. " The best laid schemes—" She heaved a sigh, said abruptly, " Good night, laddie," and she went slowly downstairs. I fell asleep with the dirge and drum of the rain in my ears, very glum and disappointed.

By the morning, however, the rain had ceased, frost had once more set in. This time it was the hard black frost which makes the air clear and sparkling as a newly-washed lemon. The hoar which had shrouded the trees was gone, replaced by ice which cased every branch and twig. The sheep, wool hung with icicles, went trailing about the moor as if they carried bells.

Grandfather arrived home at night enthusing about the state of the loch. The ice was now smooth as slate, " No' a runkle on it." Everything boded well for the match on Saturday.

On Friday night Grandmother tackled the baking, I giving her a helping hand if possible, but more often than not getting in her way. She set me to the job of keeping the fire going well, piling on plochs of oak and fragrant fir. When Grandfather came in he stared amazed at the array of delicacies laid out on the table, all iced and glittering in the firelight.

" I'm sure you werena needing to make sic an array o' fancy melt-in-the-mouths," he observed. " Something good and solid wad be mair to the menfolk's liking."

" I ken my ain ken best," Grandmother answered testily. " A champion maun show off a' his or her tricks. Is that no' what you ettle to do the morn? "

The great day dawned gloriously, clean and crisp as a nut, with not a breath of wind stirring. The morning hours seemed

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interminable, but at length, dinner by with, Grandfather and I were ready for the road, each carrying a basket filled with Grandmother's delectables.

Grandfather looked like a little old elf, with his glowing cheeks and bright, noticing eyes. He wore a suit of hodden grey, and on his head was set an ancient hat which looked as if it had been cut down from a jellybag. He trotted along in front of me, never pausing for breath, louping over the frozen burns as agilely as I myself. At length we reached a point from which the loch was visible, lying in the cup of the glen below us, the ice black and faintly luminous.

"There's the team collected," Grandfather said. "We're late, laddie, and dagont! I wanted to be first on the scene."

He increased his pace, and I had to break into a run to keep up with him. I was glad when we reached the curling house and I was able to hand over the basket of cakes to the laird's butler.

Grandfather lost no time in joining his team-mates. They greeted him boisterously, assuring him that they were all in fine fettle, ready to inflict a crushing defeat on the Dun Geon boys. Grandfather was to skip one of the rinks.

The other skips were the laird, kilted, a fine figure of a man, with a Balmoral bonnet set at a jaunty angle on his brindled hair and a gravat of the McNicol tartan round his neck; and the minister, tall and spare, in a suit of threadbare black and a cloth cap, with ear comforters, drawn down over his massive brow.

Men, women, and children were now arriving to watch, thronging up the track through the wood, or trooping across the moor from isolated farms and cottages. I noticed Sim Herries talking with the doctor; they were in jovial mood, laughing heartily together.

Excitement and expectation mounted as the time set for the arrival of the Dun Geon team approached. The crowd moved to take up positions along the bank, with the team and those members of the committee who were not members of the team in the forefront. The minutes slipped away, and there was no sign of the visitors. The crowd became restless.

It was suggested that the Dun Geon boys had taken cold feet, reneiged at the last moment. Then all at once the gabble of voices was hushed as the sound of hoofs and the whine of wheels on the ashed track became audible. Thick rhododendrons and bushes of holly hid from view the road winding among the trees, and all eyes focused on the place at which the approaching vehicle would emerge into the open. A cheer went up as presently the familiar figure of Jock Freill, the driver of the station brake, came in sight, Jock whipping his team forward to the loch edge.

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The cheering gave way to a concerted gasp of astonishment as it was realised that sharing the dickey seat with Jock were two ladies, Grandmother and Bell Boylan, the priest's housekeeper, while packed tight as sardines in the brake were ten other ladies, all kenspeckle members of the community. A pennant fixed in the whip-socket announced to all and sundry:

The Dun Geon Curling Club

A deathly hush fell upon the crowd as Jock descended and helped Grandmother and her companion down. Two sets of curling stones were laid on the grass at their feet. The other ladies alighted and grouped themselves round Grandmother who turned and bowed to the gaping crowd. Grandfather, scowling with annoyance, stepped forward and confronted her.

" Guid afternoon, Jeams, and gentlemen," Grandmother said cheerfully. " Here we are—a wee bit late maybe, but better late than never."

" Whit kind o' a joke is this you're up to? " Grandfather demanded to know.

" It's no joke, Jeams, my guid man. You and your cronies accepted our challenge to play a match at the curling, and we're here to do just that."

" But this is ridiculous! Wha ever heard o' women curlers? You've nane o' you thrown a curling stone in your life—"

" Have we no', Jeams? That's where you're mistaken. Every nicht for a week now we've practised—"

" Whaur hae you practised? " Grandfather was incredulous.

" In the dungeon of the old castle. Eh, man, you never kent there was sic a grand curling rink at your ain backdoor. Dun Geon—that's just a fancy way of writing ' dungeon.' "

" Is that why you keepit the callant in bed for a week, when he could weel enough hae been up and about? You wanted to mak' siccar he wouldna discover what you were about? " Grandfather's tone was scathing.

" Doctor's orders, Jeams; doctor's orders," Grandmother said blandly. " I ay like to abide by what the doctor advises."

I was tempted to cry out that the doctor was in the conspiracy. There was no doubt in my mind that the injury to my ankle had been in a way a godsend, giving Grandmother, with the doctor's connivance, an excuse to keep me out of the way. The voices I'd heard at night were the voices of the ladies going home after a session in the dungeon. I understood too why Grandmother had baked such a variety of fancy cakes. It was to impress the ladies, to provide evidence that she was indeed the champion baker of the parish. In her own way she was as guilty of vainglory as was Grandfather, whom she condemned so forthrightly.

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"And we had a capital man to teach us our lessons," Grandmother continued, unabashed.

"Wha?" Grandfather was getting more annoyed every minute.

"Your old cronie, Sim Herries."

"Sim! The foumart!" Grandfather spluttered. "Weel, you and Sim and the rest o' you wasted your time. You can climb back into your brake and ride to the devil out o' here. The Carnock Club's no' to demean itself playin' a wheen o' fushionless women."

At this the minister protested. "You're being ungallant, Jeams. I think it would be most unsporting of us to refuse to play the ladies."

"Hear! Hear!" the crowd behind gave voice as one. "Honour your word, Jeams. Let the ladies show us what they're worth."

Grandfather was silent for a little, his expression dour and glum. "I gie in," he said at length. "We'll play the match; but I doubt if it will be an edifying spectacle."

The teams moved on to the ice. The skip in opposition to the laird was Hannah Hogg, the roadman's wife, a small, frail-looking woman. The minister's adversary was Bell Boylan, the priest's housekeeper. These two games promised to be diverting, but surely the titbit of the afternoon was the battle between Grandfather and Grandmother.

"Woman, you'll rue the day you set out to make a cod out o' me; I'll hae no pity on you," Grandfather said, as he walked beside Grandmother to their rink.

"I wish you luck, Jeams," Grandmother said sweetly. "You'll maybe need it." She was revelling in the situation, enjoying to the full this baiting of Grandfather.

Now there was a rush of spectators to take up position. The ice groaned and cracked and shivered, and for a moment I feared that it would disintegrate and leave us all gasping in the chill water among the minnows one could see gliding and gleaming underneath the ice.

Old Will Thom, the gamekeeper, fired his gun into the air. The match was on. The first stones went gliding and booming on their way. It was soon apparent that Sim Herries' time as tutor had not been misspent. The ladies, as old Will expressed it, "had the purchase." Excitement mounted with every end played. Shouts of encouragement echoed in the still air. It would seem that the majority of the spectators were rooting for the ladies.

I was bidden by Grandfather to keep him informed as to how

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the other rinks were faring. I raced from one to another, vastly intrigued by the attitudes of the ladies as they put their shots. Each time Hannah Hogg made a delivery she seemed to lose balance and sat down heavily on the ice, where she remained clasping her legs and watching the stone on its journey.

Surprisingly the stone always went the distance and as often as not finished up against another, " cracking an egg."

The laird's rink was the first to finish. Victory was his by seven shots. It had been a grand game, played sedately, for the ladies stood a little in awe of the laird, who was not only gentry but a gentleman, all courtesy and deference.

The minister, alas, was off his game entirely, and was seen to shudder and draw the comforters tighter about his ears as one at least of the members of his rink blasted him in unbiblical language. Sometimes his stone did not pass beyond the hog and suffered the ignominy of being pushed out of play. It might be that he was disturbed by the sight of Bell Boylan making the sign of the cross each time she sent a stone zooming towards the ring. The end found him a loser by as many shots as the laird had won.

Grandfather's rink was still playing when I broke the news to him.

" It mak's nae odds, laddie," he said cheerfully. " I hae the match won at the last end."

He indicated his own two stones lying like twins in a bed only an inch from the tee, with his rink-mates' hovering like guardian angels on either side.

Grandmother had still to play, but Grandfather had no fear that she would alter the situation. His position was impregnable.

Grandmother was standing on the crampit, an oddly lonely figure, I thought, her attitude drooping, dispirited. A deeper hush descended on the crowd, a sympathetic hush. Meg Forrest, who throughout the game had been furiously sweeping the ice ahead of every stone sent up by her sister players, stood poised, broom in hand, ready to clear any obstructions from the path of Grandmother's stone.

All at once Grandmother's attitude underwent a change. Bracing herself bravely, she looked defiantly at Grandfather, took up the stone, and threw it with such force that, as one wag remarked, it seemed she was aiming to hit Bindra Hill, a mile away. The dirl of it along the ice might well have carried to the ears of long-dead curlers sleeping sound in the village kirkyard. It had the force of Grandmother's venom behind it and might have succeeded in creating havoc in the ring had it not been lamentably wide.

Meg Forrest, realising that this whizzer required no coaxing

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by broom, stood as if turned to granite, the broom raised in her hands.

Always afterwards Grandmother declared that it was God who had stayed Meg's hand at that moment. The stone, encountering some obstruction, checked in its headlong career—some of the witnesses declared it jumped like a puddock clean off the ice; but no matter, it veered at diminished but not ineffectual speed and zoomed straight for the tee. What exactly happened then, no eye was quick enough to notice. There was a series of miniature thunder-claps as stone cannonaded against stone—this was not a cracking but a smashing of eggs.

All was confusion for a minute, and then at last the miracle was there for all to perceive: Grandmother's stone was plumb on the mark, and her rink-mates' were clustered about it like ducklings about a duck, as Neil the poacher observed.

The great game was won; and the Dun Geon Club were the winners. A great shout of laughter and delight went up from the crowd.

Grandfather stood incredulous, crestfallen. He was a bad loser, and it was galling indeed that Grandmother should be the one to lower his colours. He directed a scowling, rather reproachful glance at Grandmother. She was still standing on the crampit, erect, glowing, smiling triumphantly.

"Jeams, man, you're forgetting your manners," the minister reminded Grandfather. "You must be the first to congratulate your good wife."

Grandfather began his little jog trot down the ice towards Grandmother, his hand outstretched. Grandmother walked to meet him, swaggering a little, I thought.

I waited eagerly, remembering her vow that she would dance a jig whenever she heard of the defeat of Grandfather or of the Carnock Club, but instead, such is the contrary way of women, she put her head on Grandfather's shoulder and began to weep as if her heart would break.

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SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 1, *Partridge*. 6, *Signs*. 9, *Stopper*. 10, *Unicorn*. 11, *Yeti*. 12, *Green*. 13, *Onus*. 16, *Myriorama*. 18, *Capon*. 19, *Nacre*. 21, *Catalysts*. 23, *Exam*. 24, *Incur*. 26, *Life*. 30, *Israeli*. 31, *Scoured*. 32, *Sidle*. 33, *Notepaper*.

Down. 1, *Pasty*. 2, *Rooster*. 3, *Rope*. 4, *Dürer*. 5, *Exuberant*. 6, *Sail*. 7, *Grownup*. 8, *Sing-songs*. 14, *Bores*. 15, *Scull*. 16, *Mince-pies*. 17, *Ascension*. 20, *Charred*. 22, *Stirrup*. 25, *Upset*. 27, *Elder*. 28, *Mere*. 29, *Soup*.

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SONG OF CHRISTMAS

Beef, mutton, and pork, shred pies of the best,
Pig, veal, goose and capon, and turkey well drest.
Cheese, apples and nuts, joly carols to hear
As then in the country, is counted good cheer.

THOMAS TUSSER

We grouped ourselves round the farmhouse porch. The sky cleared, and broad streams of stars ran down over the valley and away to Wales.. On Slad's white slopes, seen through the black sticks of its woods, some red lamps still burned in the windows.

Everything was quiet; everywhere there was the faint crackling silence of the winter night. We started singing, and we were all moved by the words and the sudden trueness of our voices. Pure, very clear, and breathless we sang:

As Joseph was a walking
He heard an angel sing;
" This night shall be the birth-time
Of Christ the Heavenly King.
He neither shall be bornèd
In Housen nor in hall,
Nor in a place of paradise
But in an ox's stall."

And 2,000 Christmasses became real to us then; the houses, the halls, the places of paradise had all been visited; the stars were bright to guide the Kings through the snow; and across the farmyard we could hear the beasts in their stalls. We were given roast apples and hot mince-pies, in our nostrils were spices like myrrh, and in our wooden box, as we headed back for the village, there were golden gifts for all.

LAURIE LEE, *Cider With Rosie*

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Voices of Praise

Last night in the open shippen
The Infant Jesus lay,
While cows stood at the hay-crib
Twitching the sweet hay.

As I trudged through the snow-fields
That lay in their own light,
A thorn-bush with its shadow
Stood doubled on the night.

As I stayed on my journey
To listen to the cheep
Of a small bird in the thorn-bush
I woke from its puffed sleep.

The bright stars were my angels
And with the heavenly host
I sang praise to the Father,
The Son and Holy Ghost.

ANDREW YOUNG, *Christmas Day*

Cherub's Chirp

After a few more signs of coyness, consisting chiefly in rubbing the backs of his hands over his eyes, and then peeping between them at Master Marner, to see if he looked anxious for the "carril," he at length allowed his head to be duly adjusted, and standing behind the table, which let him appear above it only as far as his broad frill, so that he looked like a cherubic head untroubled with a body, he began with a clear chirp, and in a melody that had the rhythm of an industrious hammer,—

God rest you, merry gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay,
For Jesus Christ our Saviour
Was born on Christmas-day.

Dolly listened with a devout look, glancing at Marner in some confidence that this strain would help to allure him to church.

"That's Christmas music," she said, when Aaron had ended and had secured his piece of cake again. "There's no other music equil to the Christmas music—'Hark the erol angils sing.' And you may judge what it is at church, Master Marner, with the bassoon and the voices, as you can't help thinking you've got to a better place a'ready."

GEORGE ELIOT, *Silas Marner*

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Warm Hearths

Oh children of the village choir,
Your carols on the midnight throw;
Oh, bright across the mist and mire,
Ye ruddy hearths of Christmas, glow!

ANDREW LANG
Ballade of Christmas Ghosts

Cool Clarinets

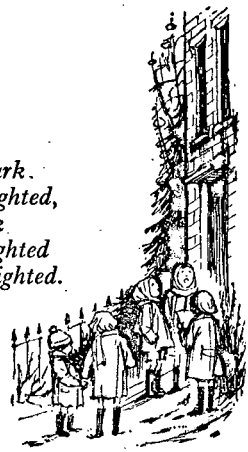
"Clar'nets, however, be bad at all times," said Michael Mail. "One Christmas—years agone now, years—I went the rounds wi' the Weatherbury choir. 'Twas a hard frosty night, and the keys of all the clar'nets froze—ah, they did freeze!—so that 'twas like drawing a cork every time a key was opened; the players o' 'em had to go into a hedger-and ditcher's chimley-corner, and thaw their clar'nets every now and then. An icicle o' spet hung down from the end of every man's clar'net a span long; and as to fingers—well, there, if ye'll believe me, we had no fingers at all, to our knowing."

THOMAS HARDY
Under the Greenwood Tree

Late Night Final

Breathless with boxes hard to handle,
The grocery drivers come and go.
Madam the Chairman lights a candle
To introduce our club's tableau.
The hopeful children pray for snow.

They cluster, mittened, in the park.
To talk of morning, half affrighted,
And early comes the winter dark
And early are our windows lighted
To wheedle homeward the benighted.



The eggnog's lifted for libation,
Silent at last the postman's ring,
But on the plaza near the station
The carollers are carolling.
"O Little Town!" the carollers sing.

PHYLLIS MCGINLEY, *Christmas Eve in Our Village*

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BETWEEN EIGHT AND EIGHT

He heard the rattle of a key in the lock

BY C. S. FORESTER

AT LAST Manners was keenly interested in his game of chess. He bent forward over the board in an attitude of concentration. He wondered if his opponent would overlook the possibility of the position; that the advance of Manners' Queen's Pawn one more square would not only attack a Knight but, by clearing the diagonal, would expose the King and his guard of Pawns to a formidable attack from Bishop as well as Rook and Queen. If his opponent should delay his counter-measure by as much as one single move he would be in a serious position; even if a quick mate did not ensue it would mean the loss of at least one piece.

But the man against whom Manners was playing was not of the type who overlooks things so important. After prolonged consideration he moved his Queen, and he moved her to the one square where she could wreak most destruction.

"Check," he said stolidly.

Manners stared at the board again. He had not paid enough attention to this possibility. Now that the move was made he could see that it initiated an attack he could not stall off. The game was lost to him, inevitably and speedily. This new guard, who had been found for him by the warden of the prison in answer to his repeated irritated requests for someone who could really play chess, played much too well for him.

And as he stared at the board again, the clock of the parish church outside the prison wall struck once more.

First the four quarters, and then, with unctuous deliberation, eight o'clock. Manners' heart throbbed painfully. Where would he be when that clock struck eight again? Manners knew; at least he knew where his limp body would be. He was filled with pettish rage about that clock. Surely the church authorities ought to stop the striking mechanism when they knew that a man lay in the condemned cell within such easy earshot of it.

He rose to his feet and turned away from the chessboard.

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"I don't want to play any more," he said, and he knew as he said it that the tone of his voice was that of a spoilt child.

"All right," said the stolid guard. He displayed no annoyance at being thus deprived of a well-earned victory. He spoke indulgently. He could not be exacting with a man who had only twelve hours to live.

"What about a hand of crib?" asked the other guard, the lively one.

"To hell with you and your crib," said Manners, pacing about the cell.

The two guards exchanged glances. They had been expecting this. Manners had stood the strain of three weeks of waiting well enough up to the present. That it had been a strain was obvious for Manners' stubbly hair, once chestnut brown, was now white, had turned white in three weeks. But that was the only sign he had shown of the strain until now, until he began pacing round the cell, seven strides up, five across, seven down. Up—across—down—across, with his thoughts racing infinitely faster, but with as little chance of reaching a definite end. Up—across—down—across. The guards were only human after all. That restless pacing began to work on their nerves.

"What about the chaplain?" asked the lively guard. "Would you like to see him now?"

"To hell with the chaplain, too," said Manners, pacing on round the cell. The dreadful throbbing of his heart made his speech blurred and indistinct.

The guards reconciled themselves to the man's caged movements. Guards in a condemned cell, who spend every minute of a man's last three weeks on earth in the closest possible contact with him, must reconcile themselves to much.

But there came a blessed distraction. There was a jingling of keys outside; the door opened to admit the warden, and then slammed to behind him. He was a man of slight, short figure, like Manners himself, dressed in a finely-cut brown suit. Manners hated him; he had a long thin pink nose and a Hapsburg lip like the King of Spain's. Everyone was conscious of a momentary tension on the warden's entrance, in case, just in case, he bore news of a reprieve. But one glance at his face was sufficient to determine that he did not.

"Well," said the warden, "how's the chess going this time?"

"Rotten," said Manners, and turned his back. The warden took the opportunity to ask the guards a question by means of a raised eyebrow; the guards replied in the negative with a shake of the head. Manners had neither offered to confess nor asked for the ministrations of the chaplain.

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"Sorry about that," said the warden to Manners. "What was the matter?"

"Matter?" said Manners, in a cracked hysterical voice. "Matter? Why—why—"

He did not finish his sentence. There is hardly any need for a man who is to be hanged in the morning to explain why he cannot play chess well. The sound of the church clock striking the half-hour came in through the bars of the cell window to accentuate the point.

"Well, what about seeing the chaplain instead?" asked the warden coaxingly. He spoke as one would to a fretful child, just as the guards had done. Manners eyed the warden. That coaxing, indulgent tone maddened him. He had heard nothing else for three weeks. And not even to satisfy the consciences of the warden, and of the hangman too, for the matter of that, would he be seduced into making a confession.

"I don't want to," he said sullenly.

With all the weight and majesty of the law turned upon him he could still be a rebel.

"Oh, come," said the warden. "That's hardly fair on us, is it? Just think—"

The thin pink nose fairly quivered with his earnestness as he pleaded for a confession. He mouthed out platitudes that Manners hardly heard; his attention was curiously distracted by that Hapsburg lip. But the warden went on pleading, and Manners began to feel himself weaken. Three weeks in a condemned cell are bad for a man's strength of will. He felt himself being driven into a confession, and he did not want to confess. Especially he did not want to give any cause for satisfaction to the warden. And the warden went on talking, and Manners stared fascinated at that long Hapsburg lip.

"You see what I mean?" said the warden.

"Oh, shut up," said Manners, and his irritation burst all bounds.

With a single stride forward he brought himself within effective range. As he came forward his right fist came up in an uppercut into which was compressed all the baffled rage which seethed within him. His fist landed on that long chin with a hard, clean smack which echoed sharply round the cell, and the warden fell to the floor utterly stunned. Not for nothing had Manners been an amateur boxer of repute.

"'Ere, I say," said the lively guard.

Both he and his stolid partner were on their feet in an instant. They sprang at Manners. The lively guard gripped him round the waist; the stolid guard tried to pinion his arms.

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But Manners was too strong for them. Rage and desperation gave him a lunatic's strength. There was plenty of muscle in his slight form. He tore his arms free. One hand gripped the stolid guard by the back of the neck; the other arm held the lively guard pinioned. One fierce mad wrench achieved its object. The head of the stolid guard crashed against the head of the lively guard with a noise like two wooden boxes struck together. That one blow might have been sufficient, but Manners was too insane to check himself. He brought those unresisting heads together again and again, until his strength ebbed from him and he let the two limp forms fall to the ground.

Manners staggered back across the cell and surveyed the wreck he had made. The whole affair had only lasted a few seconds; and perhaps it was not more than two or three more before Manners recovered himself sufficiently to think clearly. Even then his first thought was that he was at last alone, comparatively speaking, for the first time for three weeks; that he could kill himself now and cheat the law if he wanted to—the very thing those two guards had been intended, all those three weeks, to prevent.

A slight movement of the warden's unconscious body recalled him to action. A man cleanly knocked out, like the warden, does not take long to recover. For a single split second Manners debated the point; whether he should give himself the not-very-satisfactory satisfaction of cheating the law, or whether he should make a wild attempt to escape.

The chances against escape were still enormous, he knew, but there was a chance, which was more than there had been five minutes ago. With a great effort he steadied himself, although he could not make his hands stop shaking—his heart was beating so fast that he trembled in every joint. But he thought clearly and fast; he was a born plotter and intriguer.

He bent over the warden, and as the latter's mouth opened to utter the first groan of returning consciousness, he crammed his handkerchief in. Whipping the coarse cover from the long pillow of his bed he wound it round and round the warden's head. He was about to bind the warden's arms when he remembered and he tore off the warden's coat and waistcoat first; it would have been impossible to have done this after tying the man's wrists together, and moreover he was now able to use his braces for the purpose.

Now that the warden was bound, gagged, and helpless, Manners could spare time to attend to the guards; but a moment's examination assured him there was no need.

The two unfortunate men were still unconscious, and likely to

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remain so. They might even die. Manners neither knew nor cared. He dragged off the warden's shoes and trousers and, moving deftly despite his trembling fingers, he dressed himself in the neat brown suit thus put at his disposal. Already the warden was writhing a little over the floor, but he could make no sound and it would be some time before he could get to his feet with his arms tied behind him.

In the warden's pocket he found many things which would be useful. Money: a handful of loose change and a pound or two in notes in the pocketbook. And keys: half a dozen on a ring. The largest, Manners guessed, was the passkey to the cell door. Then there were two Yale keys. For a second Manners stood fingering these, deep in thought. But he had no time to spare. He must do his thinking while in action.

He had to brace himself again to open the cell door; every one of his actions after that must be made without a trace of hesitation. The big key opened the door; of course it would. He stepped out into the corridor with his heart pounding against his ribs. His mind was racing through a long series of mazed recollections. He tried to remember the entrance to the prison; he had seen it several times—when they had taken him out to his trial and when they had brought him back to die.

He had gone more than once to the chapel. He had gone there that very morning—today was Sunday—with a guard at each side of him. Most of all was he trying to remember one certain door in the wall of the long corridor in which he found himself. It was a door rather different from the cell and chapel doors. Once, as he was being led past it, the warden had come through it, alone, shutting it behind him. It was the door into his private apartments, Manners was sure . . .

As he walked down the corridor he tried to call up before his mind's eye what he remembered of that door. He could remember the colour of it; he could remember the brass knob. With a huge effort he assured himself that he had noticed the tiny brass plate which surrounded the small Yale keyhole. Another huge effort assured him the keyhole was on the left-hand side of the door—it would never do to hesitate in front of it.

One of the two Yale keys in his pocket would open it; he could not tell which. It would be a frightful risk to fumble, but it was a risk he must take. After all, it was an even chance. He put his hand in his pocket and gripped one of the keys ready. He thought, as he did so, that probably his life depended upon which key of those two chance guided into his fingers.

With such feverish rapidity had his mind worked that he had not taken more than half a dozen strides yet.

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He was in the well-remembered long corridor badly lit with a series of electric bulbs at intervals along the wall. It was the ground floor, and the cell from which he had emerged was at the far end, convenient to the execution shed and the yard where he had walked for exercise, a guard on each side of him. But Manners was walking in the opposite direction, towards the entrance hall and the warden's door.

Far down, at the very end, a guard sat on a chair looking towards him. But he was a long way off; Manners had much the same figure as the warden's, and he wore the warden's clothes. And the guard never thought for one moment that the man who was to die tomorrow at eight would be loose in the corridor and walking with a firm step towards him. And the light cast by the unshaded electric bulbs was harsh and deceptive.

Manners walked down towards him, past three empty cells, past the chapel doors. He stopped at the right moment outside the warden's door. At the same instant he brought the key from his pocket and thrust it into the keyhole. For a heart-rending tenth of a second it would not turn. Then it yielded, and the door opened, and Manners stepped inside and closed the door quietly behind him.

He had never before been where he found himself now. It was a flagged hall with several doors. He flung an agonised glance round the place; his thumping heart leapt more painfully than ever when he caught sight of what was clearly the door into the street at the other end.

Even then he restrained himself sufficiently to look round for a hat and overcoat. But a woman's voice came from behind one of the doors.

"Is that you, George?"

There was no time to lose. He tiptoed across the hall, opened the frontdoor, and passed through it into darkness and freedom, and shut it after him. It was raining terribly, and a cold wind blew, but he must not wait. He ran down the stone steps, and out through the gate to the pavement, where he hurried along, head down, shoulders bent.

There were few people about in such vile weather, and Manners regretted that he had not found a hat and overcoat—his lack of them would call attention to himself. Even as he reached this conclusion, catastrophe ensued. Fate, which had guided him well so far, ordained that it should be beside a street lamp that he should encounter a policeman.

The policeman, his cape glittering with moisture in the lamplight, looked curiously at the coatless figure hurrying by;

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Manners looked furtively from the corner of his eye at the policeman. He saw the policeman start with incredulous surprise at the first recognition, saw him hesitate, saw him decide, heard his voice calling him back.

Manners broke into a run. Five seconds later he heard the policeman's whistle blow. He ran madly, desperately. Behind him he still heard that remorseless whistle; the policeman, hampered with cape and greatcoat, could not hope to catch him on foot.

The prison entrance stood back from a main road—not so well lighted as usual, this being Sunday—and at the first opportunity Manners turned aside and plunged into a sidestreet; racing down that, he turned corner after corner, his lungs bursting, his heart pounding.

It was a chase like those in a nightmare. Whistles seemed to be blowing everywhere. Once someone tried to seize him, but he tore himself free and pounded on. Luckily there were few people about in those quiet suburban by-streets in that awful weather.

Stealing a glance over his shoulder he saw the lights of a motor-car in pursuit—the headlights, dazzlingly bright, held him in their beam. He flung himself round another corner, and with a mad, colossal effort he leapt in his stride over the hedge and railings of a suburban front garden. Crouching behind the hedge in the pelting rain he saw the car tear past him; then he heard many running feet and voices.

"No 'at," panted someone to someone else as they ran by.

"No 'at? We'll find 'im all right."

Still Manners crouched in the garden; from the lighted, curtained windows behind him came music and laughter. The Sunday evening party in that little suburban house had remained unconscious of the mad pursuit outside.

Long after the last sound of pursuit had died away Manners rose stiffly to his feet. He was shuddering now with cold, and he was drenched with rain and sweat.

But the wait had given him time to plan his next move. He must find shelter and concealment. No hotel, no lodging-house, would offer him those as he was, without luggage, and—he strongly suspected—muddy with crouching in the mould of the front garden.

His wife? She would have gone away for certain, he knew not whither. Nor was he sure she would shelter him; on the contrary, he was nearly sure she would not. And now that the police knew of his escape the first place in which they would seek him would be at his wife's. There he could not go.

He decided almost automatically where he would seek refuge.

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He would go to Ethel's. The police had no knowledge of any connection between him and Ethel; nothing had come out about her at his trial—although, God knew, enough women had been dragged into that business. Manners, the born intriguer, had seen to it, from long before he was guilty of murder, that no one knew of their friendship, and he could rely upon Ethel not having made public her relationship with Manners, the murderer.

Ethel lived alone in rooms; Ethel had loved him—the first was a subtle result of the second. At Ethel's he would find rest and concealment. Extraordinarily fatigued, he began to walk stiffly through the remorseless rain to where Ethel lived.

He had now only a slight idea of where he was, because the prison was in a suburb with which he had but small acquaintance. But the suburb in which Ethel lived was on the same side of the river. He could probably make his way to it by keeping to the by-streets and steering in a general way eastwards. He was wet through, and excitement and his mad run had made him very tired—the three weeks of agony he had borne since his appeal was dismissed had not helped to keep him fit. But there was no chance of relaxation; not, that is to say, until he reached Ethel's.

Every footstep he heard struck terror into him; every other second he peered anxiously about for the menacing approach of a policeman. Time and time again he turned about in his tracks and made his way round some other corner because he saw people or policemen approaching him. The delays were irritating, but he could not risk passing people in the street, not at this late hour, hatless and coatless and muddy in the pelting rain.

He had to nerve himself to a fierce effort to cross the radial main roads as he encountered them, one after the other. His poor heart flogged away at his ribs; just that was enough to tire anyone, let alone this continual nervous strain and this walking—walking—walking through the dark streets and the pitiless rain. By now he could feel no emotion save that of fear. He felt neither elation nor hope.

He never thought once of the excited headlines which were being drawn up in a thousand newspaper offices, proclaiming his escape and admitting that he was the first man in England to escape from the condemned cell since Jack Sheppard. All he could do was to tramp onwards, shaken by his pounding heart, peering continually about him.

It was a long, long walk to cross from west to east, but at last he began to reach a neighbourhood that was familiar to him, and then he turned another corner and found himself in the suburban street where Ethel had her rooms. He reached the

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house and turned into the front yard, shutting the gate very very quietly after him.

There he had to stop for a while, forcing his numbed brain to think clearly. He could not knock at the door. There could be no surer way of attracting attention to himself than by knocking at four in the morning at the door of an apartment house. Besides, it would not be Ethel who opened it.

He crept to the ground-floor front window and stared into the darkness there. Long and anxious peering at the shadowy shapes within assured him at last that the furniture there was familiar to him. Ethel still lived there; this was her sitting-room.

Her bedroom was the corresponding room at the back of the house—Manners knew that well; he knew, too, how the windows opened into the backyard. The house was semi-detached. He tried the side gate—so softly—but it was locked. Once more he nerved himself for an effort.

He stood and listened lest he could detect through the monotonous downpour of the rain the stealthy tread of a policeman's rubber-soled boot. He could hear nothing. Bracing himself once more, he stretched his stiff limbs in a wild leap for the top of the gate. His fingers clutched it; then, with an effort which brought the sweat pouring from him in rivers, he dragged himself to the top, sprang over, and lowered himself to the ground.

He tiptoed down the dark passage to the back of the house. He had reached at last shelter and protection. Turning the corner, he crept into the yard, crept up to the window, and tapped at the pane. He leaned forward in utter exhaustion against the sill.

Ethel was in bed. She might even be said to be dozing. Hour after hour of that dreadful night she had turned back and forward in her bed. She had turned on the light and tried to read; she had turned off the light and tried to sleep unavailingly. She could not tear her thoughts away from the man who had to die next morning, the man in whose arms she had lain, who had wooed her with honey-sweet words.

Despite the coldness of the night her bed became fever-hot to her. The town hall clock in the main road, tolling out remorselessly each passing quarter of an hour, sickened her each time she heard it. Not that she loved the man now. The reports of the trial had told her much about him that she had not known—not merely that he was a murderer (that she might have borne with) but that he was a married man and that there were other women in his life, so that she knew him now for the liar and cheat that he was, and she hated him for it. But even that did not help her to sleep when she knew that at eight o'clock guards' arms

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would grasp the waist she had clasped as they dragged him from the cell, and the hangman's rope would bruise and tear the neck she had kissed.

And yet, towards morning, she fell into a fevered, troubled doze, from which something roused her with a dreadful start. Someone was tapping on the pane of the window. She sat up in panic. Again there came the tapping at the window. Ethel was a brave woman; she flung off the bedclothes, snatched her flashlight, and approached the pane.

A shadowy shape was visible through the glass. Then she pressed the switch and saw the face. For a second she actually did not recognise him, for his hair was white now, and his face was marked with awful anxiety; he was so different from the dapper, selfconfident Mr. Manners she had known. She stared dumbly at the vision.

Grimy, bloody hands pressed against the glass. The sagging mouth opened and shut, and the hands made pitiful gestures to her. She understood. She pushed up the sash quietly, and shrank back to the farther end of the room; the beam of the flashlight shone steadily on him.

Slowly, with infinite weariness, Manners hauled himself over the sill and half fell into the room; but he roused himself to close the window behind him before he turned and faced her.

"What do you want?" murmured Ethel; she spoke instinctively in a whisper.

Manners' answer was half a groan.

"Ethel!" he said, staggering blindly towards her.

"Keep back!" she said, and Manners stood still, drooping. Fatigue and anxiety had nearly done their work. But one last effort of the failing consciousness, one last flash of the intriguer's brain, told Manners what he had been fool enough to forget before. The old spell which had bound Ethel to him, which had made her subservient, had lost its power now.

Disappointment and dismay came to help fatigue and anxiety. His heart nearly failed him as he stood there, knees sagging, swaying on his feet.

"So you were married all the time?" said Ethel bitterly.

Manners could only mumble unintelligibly in reply.

"Then, why don't you go to your wife for help?"

She hated him at that moment, hated him with an intensity which shook her as though in the grip of the ague. But her hatred was not great enough to give her the strength to utter the scream which would bring her help and result in the arrival of brutal men who would drag Manners away to the scaffold.

The bitter hostility in her tone completed the work which

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fatigue and anxiety had begun. Manners uttered a little moan and fell forward on his face, a senseless, motionless lump.

For a long time Ethel could only stand and gaze at him as he lay in the circle of light thrown by the torch. The town hall clock roused her. It struck the four quarters then six o'clock. That reminder of the passage of time called her back to her senses.

She had no notion of how Manners had escaped, but she could picture the fevered search that was happening in the world outside. She could not think what to do; for the matter of that, she grimly realised, she did not know what she wanted to do. She could not bring herself to give Manners up; at the same time she did not want to be the instrument to save him. And her practical sense told her that it would be impossible for her to keep him concealed here in her rooms.

It was not until some time later that she realised that she was shuddering with cold. She dressed herself in the darkness, creeping quietly about the room. The usual early morning noises reached her from the outside.

Then she felt a sudden panic; perhaps the police had traced Manners here; they might already be quietly surrounding the house. She must go and see. She must get into the open to think. And when Manners recovered he would need food. Bread she could buy at the grocer's round the corner, who opened early; tea she would be able to make him over her gas-ring here. She realised sadly that however much she hated Manners she could not deny him food. She put on her hat and her coat, and stooped over Manners' prostrate body.

"Dick," she whispered, but Manners did not answer. She shook him, but he made no movement. His clothes were wringing wet—a little pool of water had drained from them on to the floor. But his heart was still beating.

Ethel snatched the blankets from the bed and spread them over him. Then, very quietly, she opened the door, and as a measure of precaution she locked it after her. She crept out to the front door, unbolted it, and passed out into the street.

Her voice and her touch had done something towards rousing Manners. Some kind of consciousness began to creep back into his brain as he lay there on the floor. He was in a burning fever; already he was plunged into the semi-delirium of pneumonia. And in this delirium all accurate memory of the events of the previous evening was expunged. He had some confused recollection of a fight in his cell, of a wild flight through darkened streets with remorseless pursuit hard at his heels. What Manners could remember of the night before was no more than he could remember of other nights.

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And then with a sudden start, with a hideous realisation which set the fevered blood pulsing hot under his skin, he remembered that he was to die today. He remembered turning sharply round yesterday afternoon in his cell to see a strange face peering through the grating of the door—the hangman come to look at him, to observe his neck and guess his weight so that he might calculate what drop to allow.

Manners moaned again; the faintest of lights that winter morning was beginning to creep in through the windows. Then he heard the clock strike; four quarters and then—and then—seven o'clock. This was the hour when they would rouse him to make a pretence at breakfast before they dragged him out to the shed in the yard which he had observed when taking exercise.

He heard the rattle of a key in the lock; it would be the warden coming in. For a moment he tried to struggle, but his frantically beating heart could stand the strain no longer.

Ethel, entering, found her problem solved for her.

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FRUIT SALAD

Whether you take your tomato juice neat or with a dash of vodka, fruit is a subject on which we can all be pithy, so let's get to the core of the matter. Over to you. Solutions, if stumped as to where to drop the peel, are on page 143

1. *An apple-pie bed is a fine old Christmas lark—for the compiler at least—but from what does its name derive?*
2. *Can you identify a. Shaddock; b. Sorb?*
3. *a. What fruit takes its name from Corinth?*
   b. Why is the tangerine so called?
4. *Wall-fruit, sea-plums, Dead Sea fruit—can you define these?*
5. *The juice of one fruit digests raw steak! Do you know which?*
6. *Do you know the fruity answers to the following:*
   a. Who or what were the Quatre Mendiants?
   b. What is the fruit of the Passion Flower?
   c. What is a Siberian Crab?
7. *These are all fruit drinks—though not soft. Do you know the fruits they are made from: Cointreau; Kirsch; Slivovitz?*
8. *Can you say a. Who introduced the tomato to us;*
   b. What war began with an apple?
9. *I'd peach on you for a plum—can you translate this thieves' cant?*

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The Last of GENERAL CHITTERLING

by Youngman Carter

WAR OFFICE files of the *Most Secret—Burn Before Reading* type are always mystifying and sometimes infuriating. The diligent student is often driven to the fringe of madness in his efforts to disentangle them. It is a matter of speculation whether an astute spy would make anything of a Top Secret folder which began with four separate schemes, each ponderously documented, and ended—as they almost invariably do—with a scribbled postcard bearing an illegibly stamped crest and the words:

This is all very fine in its way, but on reflection I think we'll proceed on the lines you and I discussed with Bertie on Tuesday. J.

Even the masters of espionage must be foxed by such superb feeling for security. Probably this is all for the best, provided the V.I.P.s really know what is afoot and the underlings are left with what the Pentagon rightly calls The Bafflegab.

Sometimes of course it deepens a mystery.

In the personal file of the erstwhile Commander-in-Chief of the Imperial General Staff, the War Office, the late Lt. General Sir Hector Drummond-Chitterling, K.C.B., D.S.O., etc., etc., there was once a letter, again identifiable only by an initial and an obsolete crest, which held the key to what might have made a seven days' wonder for the world, had the world ever known about it.

The document is preserved in the great room overlooking Whitehall, with its dignified portraits of King and Field Marshals, where the mystery occurred. It is preserved, like a glove once worn by a hero's mistress, but never referred to. On the single sheet of very expensive paper is inscribed in precise script:

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I am so glad you will see the old boy. I feel sure he has something, but he is too vague and irascible to get past your barrage of experts. In any case, he may amuse you for half an hour. I have told him Tuesday a.m. Yrs. A.

At the bottom is scribbled in the C.I.G.S.'s own green pencil,

Earling? Irving? 11.30.

The only other clue to the mystery is a curiously-shaped piece of bone or ivory which is now housed in the desolate darkness of what is called The Trophy Store (Room 6.)

Ex.-R.S.M. Ransome of the Coldstream, two security scrutineers, and Captain Betty Tripp, W.R.A.C., who would hate to be described as an usherette or even a receptionist, all on duty on that fatal Tuesday in the War Office, have roughly the same story.

"He was an old man. Looked vaguely like Augustus John or Bernard Shaw. Had a beard, and a biggish hat which he took off very politely. He wore one of those cloak-style overcoats which old men sometimes wear and are now affected by very young men from the Varsities to attend race-meetings or rugger matches. He came to the front entrance at 11.30 and was not seen to leave."

Captain the Hon. Robert Van Tiffin, the P.A. to the C.I.G.S., is a little more precise.

"I think he was very old," his statement runs. "About eighty or possibly more, but reasonably spry. His hair was still strong but quite white. He had a slightly trimmed beard and a big head with a beaky nose. Not Jewish, but sort of patriarchal. He also had freckles which I've never seen on an old man before.

"The only really odd thing I noticed about him was that he appeared to be smoking. I mean that in the lift I nearly ticked him off for it, since he blew a cloud of smoke out of his mouth, but did not do so because I could see no pipe or cigarette. He had very old black ammunition boots and his coat was some sort of green tweed. I left him with the C.I.G.S. at 11.35 and did not see him go out."

The old man in fact stood still just inside the tall double doors which the Hon. Robert had closed discreetly behind him, and gazed around with slow almost awestruck curiosity upon Haig, Wellington, Kitchener, King William (of William and Mary,) and F.M. the Earl of Kirkintulloch, of whom history records practically nothing.

Sir Hector Drummond-Chitterling had kept his desk in the same place as many of his predecessors, with his back to the domed central window, so that on a fine morning he was practically invisible or at best a silhouette confronting the visitor. This

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gave him what he called a strategic advantage, for he was never a man to coin a phrase.

After a decent pause in which he summed up the situation with what must be considered masterly ineptitude, he picked up one of his four telephones and said, "Ah, Bobby. Let me know, will you?" which was a private signal meaning, "Come in and get rid of this fellow as soon as I press the bell under my desk."

To the visitor he said, "Well, come in, come in. Sit down, will you? Make yourself comfortable, eh? Now, Sir Arthur has told me a lot about you in a roundabout kind of way. He seems to think you may be useful. I'm afraid I haven't a lot of time, so let's get to the point, eh?"

As Generals go, Sir Hector was a fair specimen. He was not an intellectual, but he had a phenomenal memory for facts and data. His mind was a first-class filing system, perpetually and rapidly producing sound answers. He was short, square, handsome in a heavy middle-aged English style, and he had the trick of looking indomitable. As the stranger put on a pair of pebble-thick glasses to peer at him, he donned this protective expression. The old man clearly fell into the category, "Lunatics, harmless."

"I was told, sir," said the stranger, "that you might be interested to see my Dragon's Teeth." He rummaged slowly within hidden pockets and finally produced a leather bag or purse with a drawstring. "This one, for example."

"Don't follow you," said the General. "Some sort of anti-tank device? These ideas are a bit out of date, you know—war's more mobile now. Concrete and all that has gone by the board. Takes too long to fix."

"This," said the old man, displaying a yellow object which might have been a small ivory paper-knife, "is very rapid. Do you possess earth here?"

His magnified myopic eyes, like a bullfrog's behind the lenses, searched the room and fixed upon a decorative pot containing ivy on the great desk, standing next to a silver-framed photograph of its donor, Lady Drummond-Chitterling.

"This will serve," he said, and pushed the curious fang into the soil at the base of the ivy. His voice had a rumbling rheumy quality as if someone was playing a record too slowly through a railway station loudspeaker.

"*Yakavit. Evabo. Lambia,*" he said, and struck the palms of his hands together. There appeared between them a small cloud which might have been dust.

"Look here—be careful," said Sir Hector. "My wife gave me that damned thing and if anything happened . . ."

But it had begun to happen.

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The jagged ivory object in the flowerpot was growing like an Indian fakir's seed. It expanded in a series of grotesque jerks to the size of a respectable elephant's tusk. The pot shivered and smashed to fragments, earth was spread all over the desk, the telephones, the in-tray, and its neighbours. The silver frame fell flat on its face and a single ominous creak from the desk showed that whatever was growing had roots which were strong and deep. The tusk itself branched into a dozen vicious forks with knife edges, quivered for a fraction of time, and was still.

Sir Hector's voice became shrill with fury.

"What the devil do you think you're up to?" he shouted. "Stop it, I say, stop it! Put it all back!"

The visitor spread out his hand in a gesture which took in the terrifying growth which now had a rigid permanence about it and indicated his leather purse.

"With one of these," he said, "a man could stop an army. It is a deep secret but very simple in operation. A peasant could use it, or if you prefer it so, a resistance fighter."

"Damn your conjuring trick," said the General. "You seem to have smashed my desk."

"True," replied the old man, "but this specific of mine has broken stouter tables than that in its time. Now, Sir General, may I show you my Simple whereby a man may make himself invulnerable against all enemies however powerful?"

"No, dammit, you may not," said Sir Hector, who was now displaying all those warning signals which had frightened more than one Army Corps into discipline. "You'll clean up this infernal mess you've made, with your own two hands. You'll look sharp about it and then you'll get out. I've work to do."

He paused for breath and was once again confronted by the defiant object, larger than himself, which resembled an enormous yellow claw placed between him and the stranger. It really was beyond a joke. "Now look here," he said, "I don't know who the devil you are, but we're not interested in conjuring tricks here. Go and play your damn games in a music hall. You don't suppose this blasted growth would stop a tank, do you?"

The old man regarded his handiwork above his thick horn glasses. It was the affectionate glance of a craftsman.

"A handful of them once held up an avalanche," he said. "Your toys would break before them. Now here, sir, is a little powder. Sprinkle it upon the air . . . thus and thus . . ."

Sir Hector would have stopped him forcibly, and made to do so, but the claw had branched to that side of the desk which it was his habit to pass and he had to turn right and so negotiate telephone cords and a wastepaper basket.

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He was too late. There were tiny particles of gold floating in dusty air about the old man.

"And I turn," said his caller, pivoting slowly, "I turn three times and I blow upon this dust. *Yakavit*, I say . . . and *Yakavit* again. *Poste*, *Poste numah*, and thrice *Yakavit*."

As he spoke, the floating golden fragments exploded into little flames and vanished leaving wisps of smoke about the tweedy old figure which were slightly scented like oriental tobacco.

"You get out of here," said the General, advancing upon him. "Get out of here now, before I throw you out."

"That is impossible," said the visitor. "It is beyond your powers. But pray make the attempt. Strike me, for example. Strike with that black rod upon your table. If you are a fool you must learn the fool's way."

Upon the desk lay an ebony ruler: an impressive but useless object, part of the ponderous furnishings. It was within arm's length and the General seized it almost as if to arm himself with a baton of office.

"I've a damn good mind to," he said, "if you don't get out of here now—and at the double."

"I shall not move," said the old man. "Strike and perceive a wonder. Strike at the air about me, if you feel some trifling respect for my years. Strike, I say."

The General was in no mood for trifling. He took a step and a step and swung the ruler, not so much to hit as to threaten. It snapped in two and the thin smoke eddied in the air about the jagged stump still clutched in his hand.

There was a long pause while neither man moved a muscle. Finally Sir Hector, with an effort which deepened the colour in his face and thickened his neck perceptibly, replaced the broken symbol on the edge of the desk. He straightened himself, clasped his hands firmly behind his back in a final effort to keep his temper, cleared his throat, and spoke.

"Whoever you are," he said, "understand this. Neither I myself nor any of my colleagues want any part of this ridiculous mumbo-jumbo monkey business. We do not deal in tricks, understand? I don't pretend to see how you've achieved all this nonsense and I don't particularly want to. I'm not Maskelyne nor Devant, sir—I'm not even Barnum and Bailey, and I want no part of your tomfooling. Now get, get out quickly before I have you flung into Whitehall."

Sir Hector was a man who, in an emergency, could make a point clearly and finally. Having delivered himself, he returned to his desk not altogether without dignity, sat down, picked up some papers, and half swung his chair towards the light.

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Without the ignominy of ringing for aid it was the best that could be made of the situation. He was not a negligible figure and he managed to convey very precisely the degree of insult he intended. So far as he was concerned, from that moment on the visitor was a vulgar nuisance, utterly without significance.

After a while the old man made a pass in the air about him and took a pace forward very delicately as a man might in stepping over a tripwire. He peered across at Sir Hector with concentration.

His voice was a deep and angry rumble.

"You are a fool," he said. "And an ass. But now that I see you clearly, your face is more like that of a pig. Not a wild boar, for you have not his crafty cunning, but a pig. And by all the powers within me, a pig you shall be."

He raised both hands above his head. "A pig," he said again. "*Yakavit. Demnos. Yakavit hoie demnos demnos yakavit.* A pig."

Captain the Hon. Robert Van Tiffin's glance passed idly from his wristwatch to the wall clock in his office and thence to Captain Betty Tripp's new hairdo.

"The governor's a long time with that old boy," he said. "Think I'd better go and break up the party?"

"I wouldn't risk it, Bobby," said his sister officer. "They might be talking very important stuff: racing, agriculture, grandchildren. Vital War Office business, you know. Dangerous to put your nose into that. Who is he, anyhow—the old boy, I mean?"

The Hon. Bobby glanced at his memo pad. "Haven't a clue," he said. "Never heard of him. Somebody Sir Arthur King sent, I believe. All the same, it's after twelve and I think I'll go and see. He's lunching in ten minutes."

He moved over to the door, opened it for a couple of inches, and peered through the crack. There was no sign of the visitor but he was greeted by a most peculiar succession of sounds.

"I say," he said. "There's something pretty queer going on here. You'd better come with me."

They entered the room on tiptoe, Bobby a pace ahead, but they were hand in hand before the strange growth on the General's desk had made its first impact. Behind it was an even greater shock.

Sir Hector was still in his chair and was indeed rotating it slowly from side to side. His collar had burst wide open and his suit, for mercifully he was not in uniform, was parting at every seam. He was making a noise which can only be described as a series of very angry grunts.

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"Oh, I say, sir!" said his aide. "Are you all right? I mean to say—that is—your ears, sir—oh, sir, have you looked at yourself in a mirror?"

"Hurrumph!" said Sir Hector with menacing ferocity.

The Hon. Bobby tightened his grip on Captain Tripp's hand. He appeared to be thoroughly scared.

"We'd better get out," he said under his breath. "We must have help."

To Sir Hector he spoke aloud. "I'll come back in a moment, sir. I'll get someone. Don't worry—it'll be all right. I'll come straight back." He heard his own voice using a tone of that reassurance more suited to an animal than to a human being.

"Garrumph! Garrumph!" repeated Sir Hector, and he turned in his chair towards them.

Hand in hand they retreated before the malice in his eyes. Outside they turned to face each other, the flush which had begun as embarrassment draining slowly out of their cheeks, leaving them pale with fright.

"What the hell do we do now?" said the Hon. Bobby. "I mean—I don't think the M.O. quite—do you?"

Captain Tripp was leaning against the door with her back to it.

"Before we do anything, Bobby," she said, "we must *think*. Who *was* that last caller? Haven't you any sort of record?"

He swung away from her and searched the memo pad on his desk; he was frowning with concentration.

"Can't read my own writing," he muttered. "I wrote it in a hurry. The name seems to be Irving or Earling. *Or* it might even be Merlin. That name rings some sort of bell with me. How about you?"

Captain Tripp regarded him steadily with beautiful but deeply horrified eyes.

"Merlin?" she said bleakly. "*Merlin*. My goodness, d'you think we ought to call a vet?"

The Hon. Bobby, an astute and resourceful young officer, moved towards the telephone.

"I shall get on to this chap A. King himself," he said. "All explanations—and there'll have to be some, pretty damn quick—should be conducted on the very highest level, I feel. This is right out of our innocent class, old girl."

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PUTTING THE LID ON IT

The last word in women's hats is: Why?

HAROLD COFFIN

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GIFT HORSES

Faine would I have a prettie thing,
To give unto my Ladie:
I name no thing, nor I mean no thing,
But as prettie a thing as may bee.

I walk the town and tread the streete,
In every corner seeking,
The pretty thing I cannot meete,
That's for my Ladies liking.

It is not all the Silk in Cheape,
Nor all the golden treasure,
Nor twenty Bushels on a heape
Can do my Ladie pleasure.

But I would fain have a prettie thing
To give unto my Ladie . . .

A Handefull of Pleasant Delites, 1584

Purse-proud

" I am making the King a purse and for all the world else I am unprovided . . ." So Lady Arbella Stuart, cousin of James I, lamented in December, 1603 . . .

As King, James was not expected to cater for individual tastes, and his gifts were uniformly gilt plate, by the ounce. But this plate had to be claimed by a complicated bureaucratic procedure.

The fifth Earl of Huntingdon, who, as his father died on December 31, 1604, had no chance to rehearse the routine of the following day, wrote out a memorandum. First, he needed to buy a 5s. purse in which to put the 20 £1 pieces of new gold. At 8 o'clock on the morning of January 1 he was to attend in the Presence Chamber at Whitehall to give the purse to the Lord

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Chamberlain. Then he must be rowed down to the Jewel House in the Tower, where he obtained a ticket, for which he put 6d. in "the box" to enable him to receive his own gift. The ticket had to be taken to another office, where he received 18s. 6d. for expenses, and, then, he might return to the Jewel House to choose a piece of plate weighing 30 oz. which was marked for him. He could collect it the same afternoon, when he must give 40s. in gold to the gentleman who gave it him, and also put 2s. in "the box" and tip the porter 6d., the price of a working-man's dinner.

Royal Presents, from The Times, December 1955

Rake-off

Say, cruel Iris, pretty rake,
Dear mercenary beauty,
What annual offering shall I make
Expressive of my duty?

A bill, a jewel, watch, or toy,
My rivals give—and let 'em!
If gems, or gold, impart a joy,
I'll give them—when I get 'em.

My heart, a victim to thine eyes,
Should I at once deliver,
Say, would the angry fair one prize
The gift, who slights the giver?

OLIVER GOLDSMITH, *The Gift*

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Highly Gifted

"I remember his [Mr. Locker] calling at my chambers one hot day in July, when he happened to have with him some presents he was in course of delivering. Among them I noticed a bust of Voltaire and an unusually lively tortoise, generally half-way out of a paper bag . . . I sometimes thought it would really be worth while to leave off the struggle for existence, and gently to subside into one of Lord Rowton's homes in order to have the pleasure of receiving in my new quarters a first visit from Mr. Locker. How pleasantly would he have mounted the stair, laden with who knows what small gifts?—a box of mignonette for the window-sill, an old book or two, as likely as not a live kitten, for indeed there was never an end to the variety or ingenuity of his offerings!"

SIR CHARLES TENNYSON, *Stars and Markets*

Low Motives

My Lilla gave me yestermorn
A rose, methinks in Eden born,
And as she gave it, little elf!
She blush'd like any rose herself.
Then said I, full of tenderness,
"Since this sweet rose I owe to you,
Dear girl, why may I not possess
The lovelier Rose that gave it too?"

ANON

Outsize Present

His blood is blue, his connections splendid, his manners excellent; he is polite, kind, attentive, jolly, amusing, & 23. About three weeks ago, he made me a present of a beautiful little alligator, about eight inches long, & just the right size. When I first got him, every one announced that he would die; I said he should not, we have fed him on raw beef & he is more lively than ever. I have named him Jack, & shall take him home.

JULIA NEWBERRY, *Diary*, 16*th March* 1869

Inside Story

After she's carefully wrapped the gift,
And labelled it with a nice tag,
It comes to her with a sudden shock—
She forgot to remove the price tag.

STEPHEN SCHLITZER

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CHRISTMAS AT RILLINGHAM'S

Young people flooded into the shop—
noise, restless limbs, and bright scarves

BY JOHN WAIN

"YOU KNOW, Sidney," Mr. Rillingham said in a loud voice, "Patty is a very lucky girl."

The reason he spoke loudly was not because Sidney was a long way away. Sidney was right next to him, helping him to arrange some new gramophones in the big window. It was because Patty was a long way away, and what was more she had a record going, as usual.

Sidney knew it did not make any difference to Mr. Rillingham whether he answered or not, so he just nodded and said, "Lucky."

"Fancy anybody getting so much fun out of what they do for a living!" Mr. Rillingham said, still loudly.

"Doesn't seem right," said Sidney, bending to pick up a display card he had knocked over.

"Mind you, I've nothing against it," said Mr. Rillingham. "Quite the reverse. It does my heart good to see anyone happy! Particularly anybody young and lovely, eh, Sidney?"

"Cor, yes," said Sidney, as if he was talking to himself.

"Young, lovely, and happy," said Mr. Rillingham. A wall of sound moved up from the other end of the shop and knocked his words back into his mouth. Sidney could imagine them curling round his large teeth like blown pieces of paper round lamp-posts and railings.

Each night I ask—the stars erp aber-her-herve:
Why merst I be—a teen-eh-eyger in lerve?

"Beg pardon, Mr. Rillingham?" Patty called down the length of the shop. "Did you say somethink?"

"I was just remarking to Sidney here," Mr. Rillingham answered, raising his voice above the swelling uproar, "that you're a very lucky girl."

"Roll on death," said Sidney quietly to himself.

"Well, don't I deserve to be?" said Patty, coming towards them. "After all, it's Christmas." She halted about six feet

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away from Mr. Rillingham, who was kneeling inside the big window with his jacket off, and gave him an arch smile.

Mr. Rillingham did not answer. He seemed slightly embarrassed. Sidney had noticed before that Mr. Rillingham liked to be facetiously flirtatious with Patty as long as they were at opposite ends of the shop and as long as he, Sidney, could be brought in as insulating material. But if Patty came close up to Mr. Rillingham and gave him the face-to-face treatment, it seemed to make him curl up.

Patty had round, staring blue eyes and fair hair cut close to her head. Sidney did not consider her face very beautiful, so he generally kept his eyes on her figure, which was of the type that suggests words like "opulent" and "generous." To put it bluntly, her breasts were so big that Sidney had at first concluded that she must have padded them out. Of late, however, he had begun to think that they must be genuine, but opportunities for verification seemed slow in coming along. Altogether the situation was one that fatigued Sidney very thoroughly.

"Seems about all right, boss," Sidney said, looking down at the four shiny record-players of different sizes and styles that they had arranged.

"Should be," said Mr. Rillingham, straightening up with relieved briskness. "I'll go outside and see." He clambered out of the window and went out through the shop door, putting on his jacket as he went.

"Bit late to be putting that lot on show, twenty-fourth," said Patty.

"Just come in," Sidney explained. "Besides, it'd surprise you how many grams and other big stuff get sold right up to closing time Christmas Eve. Families get all set for the Christmas binge, then the young ones come home and say, 'No! Not still using the *old* type record-player?' The old man comes round here with his pockets bursting with Christmas money and wham! Before you know we've sold three, four gramophones on Christmas Eve afternoon!"

"Uh huh," Patty answered. She was moving her mouth rhythmically, as if chewing a piece of gum, and watching Mr. Rillingham standing outside on the pavement like a customer.

Sidney wondered why he bothered to talk to Patty. He never struck a natural tone with her. His feelings towards her were too confused.

Mr. Rillingham, outside on the pavement, gave a last critical glance to the big window, went round the corner to look at the small one, and came back to the shop door. He was just opening it when a party of young people, two youths and two girls, all in

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duffel jackets and slacks, surged round the corner and jostled through the door. They did not appear to see Mr. Rillingham, though they all but pushed him out of the way in their triumphant assault on the shop door.

Sidney had a glimpse of Mr. Rillingham's face, red and glaring with anger, through the glass of the door. Then the young people flooded into the shop, seeming to fill it with noise, restless limbs, coloured scarves and gloves, and the name "Patty." It was as if a party had started up in the shop.

Sidney watched Mr. Rillingham walk slowly into the shop, shut the door behind him, and stand for a moment looking at the five young people clustered round the record display at the far end. As he watched, the annoyance faded from his face and it creased into a pudgy smile.

"Best thing I ever did for the business, Sidney," said Mr. Rillingham fondly.

"Made a difference," said Sidney.

"It's the young people that have got the money today, Sidney," said Mr. Rillingham. "Our disc trade'd be nothing without the young people."

"Thirty-four," said Sidney under his breath.

"Rock and roll!" said Mr. Rillingham joyously. "Long life to it!"

"Many happy returns," said Sidney.

"So everybody's happy," said Mr. Rillingham. "A very nice thing to be able to say at Christmas time! Patty likes selling this type of line, she can talk to the customers about it! She's as much a fan as they are!"

Silly cow, said Sidney within himself.

"You know how many pictures of Elvis Presley she has at home, that girl?" Mr. Rillingham demanded, wheeling on Sidney.

"Pretty fair, I expect," said Sidney, flicking about him with a duster.

"*Ninety*," said Mr. Rillingham solemnly. "All different. So she tells me, and I believe her. I tell you she's *mad* on that stuff."

"Mad's right," said Sidney, before he could stop himself. Mr. Rillingham frowned.

"Mad or not, young man," he said, his tone changing in an instant, "it's enthusiasm that sells a line, makes it move off the shelves. Why do these young people come in here rather than another shop? Because of Patty. And why because of Patty?"

To look at her big knockers, Sidney wanted to say. But he knew that Mr. Rillingham's reason was the true one.

"They like a saleslady that understands their tastes. Why,

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she'll play records with 'em for hours and never worry if they go out at the end of it without buying a one. And I don't worry either! It doesn't do a record any harm to be played a few times. And then when the day comes that they *have* got some money . . . Ha!" Mr. Rillingham breathed, wrapped in a beatific vision of expanding and still expanding business. "They come here because they remember the good time they had with Patty playing rock and roll to them all afternoon and never asking them to buy one!

"And that time does come, Sidney," Mr. Rillingham added sharply, as if remembering that he was giving Sidney a pep-talk. "It always does come. Because it's the young people today, in the world we're living in, that have got the money."

"Thirty-five," Sidney counted quietly.

Got mahself a cryin' talkin' sleepin' walkin' LIVING DAHL, shouted the gramophone above the whinnying of the adolescents.

The telephone rang, and Mr. Rillingham moved across to answer it. Sidney was glad to be left alone for a moment, to swallow down his bad temper. He began savagely polishing a record cabinet with his duster. Why did Mr. Rillingham have to come every five minutes and tell him, Sidney, what a lot of good Patty was doing the business? Sidney was not even on the sales side; he was training to be a radio and TV technician.

Already he had quite a responsible job, driving the van round and delivering sets and installing them; he could repair most things and was going to evening classes and studying for a diploma. He wasn't interested in standing behind a counter and playing tomfool rock and roll discs for a lot of giggling kids in duffel coats. Why did Mr. Rillingham feel it necessary to tell *him*, Sidney, thirty-five separate times, that the young people were the ones with the money nowadays?

As for Patty, Sidney considered her a big phoney. He was pretty sure, for one thing, that they called her "Pat" at home. He would take a bet that she had started calling herself Patty because it was the kind of name that went with pop and rock. No doubt if she had written it down she would have spelt it with an i, Patti. Sidney decided that what she needed was to be taken over someone's knee and have her bottom spanked.

At the same time, being an honest boy and always ready to own up to base motives, he admitted to himself that it would be nice to have a girl like Patty for a bit of the old you-know-what. It was a pity she did not seem to go for him at all. They would have been just right, especially for age, he being eighteen and she seventeen. Sidney felt sad, and without warning a heavy sigh escaped him.

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"Yes, we're ready, Sam," Mr. Rillingham was saying into the telephone. His voice sounded pleased and excited. "I've got it O.K.'d by the post office. Bring it round whenever you like."

He hung up and walked off to his desk at the back of the shop. Sidney thought how typical this was. If there was anything really to say, Mr. Rillingham never bothered to tell Sidney till the last minute. Whereas, on the other hand, Sidney was quite good enough to be chattered to, especially about Patty. The fact was that Mr. Rillingham liked talking to himself, but didn't want to admit it because of seeming eccentric, so he made a show of talking to Sidney.

The adolescents were in a spending mood. They played a dozen records and bought nearly all of them. Patty was leaning against the counter, tapping her foot and singing the lyrics. Sidney could hear her even above the racket, because she sang exactly to the rhythm but not quite exactly to the key. In this way she achieved the maximum grating effect on Sidney's nerves.

She knew all the records by heart and never made a mistake: for instance, if a singer gave the word "love" three wobbles so that it came out as "ler-her-herve," Patty did exactly the same, neither a wobble less nor a wobble more. She gasped and gulped in all the right places; it was quite an accomplishment. Only she did not seem to have any sense of pitch.

The kids went out with their records in Christmas paper under their arms, and for a moment the shop was quiet. Mr. Rillingham called over from his desk, "What're you on now, Sidney?"

"Got to get this job wired up," Sidney called. "Then I'm free. Thought I'd go out and get the—"

"Just stay where I can see you for five minutes," said Mr. Rillingham, as if Sidney were a mischievous child. "They're bringing something round from Mayhew's wholesale that I want to show you and Patty."

"Something to show us!" said Patty, overdoing the girlish excitement. "Something for Christmas!"

"Yes, something for Christmas," said Mr. Rillingham, smiling carelessly. "A Christmas present to the shop."

"Oh—the shop!" She pouted with magenta lips. "How does the *shop* know it's Christmas?"

"Never mind, Patty," said Mr. Rillingham, leaving his desk and coming forward. "The shop isn't the only one that's going to get a Christmas treat, is it?"

Sidney, watching intently from the corner of his eye, saw Patty glance up sharply as if to caution Mr. Rillingham, who stopped talking and looked for a moment as if he could have bitten his tongue off.

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This led Sidney to analyse the last sentence Mr. Rillingham had spoken. It seemed harmless enough, except for that concluding " is it? " To tell the girl she was going to get a Christmas treat was one thing, but " is it? " suggested that there was something afoot between them.

Sidney thought of Mr. Rillingham's wife, who was like a jowly old bulldog. At one time Mrs. Rillingham had come to the shop nearly every day, but a few months ago Mr. Rillingham had bought a new house out in the country, and now she came very seldom, the bus service not being good.

" We need all these ordering, Mr. Rillingham," said Patty in a bright businessgirl voice, handing a list to her employer. " We're getting quite low on EPs. You wouldn't believe how the Cliff Richards have been going! And we shall be needing replacements for the Nat King Coles and a lot of new cha-cha-cha."

Cha-cha-cha, thought Sidney bitterly. I'd like to give you ruddy cha-cha-cha. And him old enough to be your ruddy father. " Roll on death," he said to himself, quite loudly.

The shop door pinged, and two men walked in. The first was redfaced Mr. Mayhew, a crony of Mr. Rillingham's; behind him came one of his employees with a bulky piece of apparatus in his arms.

" Hullo, Sam! " Mr. Rillingham shouted. " No, leave it there, by the telephone! " Smiling plumply, he danced down the shop.

A middle-aged man, staring about him morosely, came in to buy some pop records to play in his cafeteria. He went down to Patty's counter, but before she could get involved in a new piece of business Mr. Rillingham called to her, " Patty, just let the gentleman look through the discs by himself a minute, if he wouldn't mind. And come up here, will you please? I've got something to show you. And you, Sidney," he added.

They all clustered round the apparatus which Mr. Mayhew's man was attaching to the telephone. " Comes on and off quite easy, see," said the man.

" Watch this, watch this, Sidney," said Mr. Rillingham impatiently. " I shall expect you to service it."

" I seen 'em before," said Sidney carelessly; he had not, but he felt something was due to his dignity. Amid chatter and exclamations, the installation went on.

" Oo! What is it? " Patty bubbled.

" Telephone-answering device," said Sidney tersely. Mr. Rillingham looked at him angrily for stealing this small piece of thunder.

" Yes, you see, Patty," he said with a fatherly smile, " when the

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shop's closed, we can have the telephone answered by this tape-recorder. It greets the customer, he says what he wants, and the tape records it! Then we play it back when we come in! It's like—like an unsleeping secretary," he finished impressively.

"Big White Deal," said Sidney under his breath.

"Right, thassit," said Mr. Mayhew's man, who seemed anxious to wash his hands of the whole affair. "Speak the words in 'ere, guv," he said, holding the microphone up to Mr. Rillingham.

"Ah no," said Mr. Rillingham archly. He was so excited about the telephone-answering device that he was quite forgetting to be discreet. "The customers won't want to hear my voice. They'll want to hear a nice young lady's voice."

"Oo, go on," said Patty. She was quite forgetting too. She was also forgetting, as Sidney sardonically noted, to act like a girl whose name was Patty or Patti. It was girls called Pat who said things like, "Oo, go on."

"Now, listen carefully, Patty," said Mr. Rillingham. He was controlling himself, keeping his voice calm as befitted a successful businessman, and only the sparkle of his eyes showed how hugely, almost insanely, he was enjoying himself. "You're going to record the message. Now, repeat after me: This is Rillingham's Television, Radio, and Music Stores at your service."

"This is Rillingham's Television and Music Shop at your service," Patty said in a high, sugary voice.

"Store, not shop," said Mr. Rillingham, but without impatience. "And you left out 'Radio.' Let's start again. This is Rillingham's . . ."

She fluted each phrase after him until they had arrived at the formula inviting the customer to name his wishes, in so far as they concerned Radio, Television, or Music, and assuring him that they should be attended to as soon as the shop reopened.

"Now, got that, Patty?" Mr. Rillingham asked anxiously.

She nodded. "This is Rillingham's—"

"All right, all right," said Mr. Rillingham. "I know you've got it. You're a clever girl. Now, what do we need to do to start the thing going? I suppose the telephone bell has to ring; Sidney, nip round to the box and—"

"No need, guv," said Mr. Mayhew's man. "Fix it without. Tell me when you want it, thassall."

Mr. Mayhew and Mr. Rillingham joked a little together about what a wonderful thing progress was, and then Mr. Rillingham gave the signal, the man started the tape, and Patty spoke the message in a voice quite different from the one she had used in repeating it after Mr. Rillingham. She dropped her voice almost

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an octave and gave it an American intonation, saying " Rillingham " instead of the English " Rillingum." When she had finished, Sidney half expected someone to comment on the difference, but no one did.

Patty's face had assumed a bright smile as she addressed the instrument, as is usual among people of primitive mental organisation, and she now kept this smile firmly in place, looking from Mr. Rillingham to Mr. Mayhew, and even fleetingly at Sidney, then back to Mr. Rillingham.

" Well done, all," said Mr. Rillingham. " Did you get the way it works, Sidney? "

" Dead simple, reely," said Mr. Mayhew's man, straightening up.

The middle-aged cafeteria owner now joined them, fleetingly, on his way to the door. " Merry Christmas," he said savagely.

" Find what you wanted, sir? " Mr. Rillingham asked affably. " My young lady's just coming to—"

" I can see she is," said the cafeteria owner. " Trouble is, I'm just going." He walked to the door. " Wish *I* could keep people waiting while I messed about," he said wistfully. " Go out of business if I did." He went out and shut the door.

" I like that! " Mr. Rillingham clucked. " Wasn't waiting five minutes! "

" Seven, actually," said Sidney. He knew before he spoke that it was a mistake to correct Mr. Rillingham, but he felt aggressive all of a sudden.

" All right, all right, my lad," said Mr. Rillingham with considerable petulance, " We all know *you've* got a good watch. *You're* always aware of the time, I've no doubt."

" Like some of mine," Mr. Mayhew put in, staring at Sidney and nodding his head sympathetically. " If they don't know anything else, they know what time it is."

Mr. Mayhew's man, standing behind his employer, winked at Sidney. But this failed to put Sidney into a good temper. He felt himself blushing hotly.

No doubt he would have burst out with some hot retort to Mr. Rillingham, but the number of retorts he felt like making was so large that they became confused and nothing came out. He wanted to call Mr. Rillingham a fat-arsed old clot and also a crafty old shark. He wanted to shout, for the whole shop to hear, that Patty was a phoney with her artificial voice and her ninety photographs and that she wouldn't live a day in the business only for her vital statistics. He wanted to tell Mr. Mayhew to go and sew his big mouth up with fuse wire. Consequently he said nothing, but stood there and flushed and glared.

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Mr. Mayhew's man winked again and this time shrugged as well. He was goodnatured, in his taciturn way, Sidney could tell.

" Well, back to work before we lose any more trade," said Mr. Rillingham in a heavy voice from which a great deal of the geniality had drained away. He looked accusingly at Sidney as if *he* was the one who was losing trade.

It was now about three o'clock, and Sidney had some orders to deliver before nightfall. He loaded the orders into the van and drove off. Driving the van was one of the things he liked best about the job; he drove skilfully and fast, and as he wove in and out of the traffic his spirits revived. After all, he reflected, he had it pretty good. A radio and TV serviceman was safe for life. It was the job of the present and the job of the future too. The van hummed along, growling in low gear through traffic, skimming over the clear patches in top like a bird, and Sidney felt better every minute.

He delivered a few sets, adapted a few plugs, accepted cups of tea and, in one hospitable house, a slice of Christmas cake. Then towards five came his last call. New tube for a television set in a big comfortable-looking Georgian house.

" Class," said Sidney to himself as he rang the bell.

He waited. It was cold, and he was just about to ring again when the door opened. Inside stood a beautiful fairhaired girl. A real smashing piece of crumpet, Sidney thought. He wondered for an instant if he was dreaming; but the comfortable solidity and bulk of his bag of tools and the spare parts in a bundle under his arm reassured him that this was happening.

" Rillingham's," he said, with an impressive air. The girl just stood and looked puzzled, so he added, " Mend the television."

The girl brightened. " Oh, tallivishn! " she said. Her voice was better than Patty's: light, but not so thin. " Comm in, wun't you? "

Won't I just, Sidney thought. He stepped inside, careful to keep his feet on the mat, and shut the door behind him. " Where's the set? " he asked.

The girl led him down a corridor and through a door at the far end. It was full of toys and children's garments. The furniture was of plain wood, scrubbed white, and there were brightly coloured pictures tacked to the walls.

" Kids' room, eh? " said Sidney brightly. " What they got, *two* TV sets? " For there, in the middle of the room, stood the set he was required to mend. Its polished, veneered wood looked odd against the selfconscious plainness of the other fittings.

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The girl told him no, only one. It was kept in the nursery because her employers were not interested in television and thought it was mostly for children. But she was interested in it. She was the au pair girl.

Sidney did not know what " oh pear " meant, but he gathered that she mainly looked after the children and that she had three hours off every day. Normally she went out in her three hours but this afternoon her employers had taken the children out and the house was so nice and quiet that she thought she would stay in, especially as she knew the television set was going to be mended and she had been missing it. She added that she was from Switzerland.

Sidney, working mechanically, had by this time got the entrails of the television set out on the floor. He could see at once a dozen ways in which this could be turned into a long job. But *long*. He could telephone Mr. Rillingham and say he wouldn't be back until after closing time and they might as well close the shop without him; he would garage the van.

He stole a glance at the girl. She must like him, or at any rate not *not* like him, if she was prepared to loaf about talking to him in her funny English while he repaired the set. And she was foreign. She might be lonely. Of course she had class, but foreign class didn't count, and anyway who was better than a TV and radio technician these days? It was the *future* that counted. In a flash, Sidney saw himself driving about, not in a van but in a chromium-heavy saloon car, with the beautiful Swiss girl sitting beside him and a fat cigar in his mouth. The future, the future!

The Swiss girl met Sidney's eyes as he glanced up at her, and gave him a delicious smile.

" You like to do that? " she asked, nodding towards the scatter of television entrails.

Sidney was startled at first, then realised that she was asking him whether he was happy in his work. It was just the opening he wanted.

" I'll say I like it," he said. " Best work in the world. Radio and TV maintenance. Work of the future. Mind you, it's crowded."

" Yes? " said the girl. She gave him her delicious smile again.

" But *crowded*," said Sidney. " Everybody wants to get into it. But ninety per cent don't get further than—well, the ruddyments. Wiring and installation."

He looked up at the girl to see if she was with him, and she said " Yes? " again.

" No brains, see," Sidney explained. " It's no mug's game,

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messing with these babies." He smiled affectionately down at the television set. " Even me, I know a pretty fair amount, I've worked with most types—and I'll admit, straight away, there's things about radio and TV that *I* don't know."

" Yes? "

" I don't know *yet*, I should say. But I will. I go to evening classes down at the Tek. That's what we call the Technical College. I aim to know it all backwards—theory and practice. Backwards. Got most of it at my fingertips now. Because you know what? I'm moving, I'm going places."

He stood up, and found that his eyes were just on a level with the girl's. She was tall. He liked that.

She smiled again, not seeming at all nervous, and said, " You are an angineer? "

Sidney smiled. He liked the way she talked, and he even liked the way she sometimes pronounced " e " as " a."

" Engineer? Yes, in a way," he said. " But I'm not staying on the engineering side all my life. I'll just master it thoroughly and then I'll get over on to the executive side. There's a place waiting for me any time I care to say, only I'm taking my time. Mr. Rillingham, that's my boss, he'd take me into the management side any time I asked him. At the moment I'm, well, what you might call the chief executive organiser of the servicing department. It's a big firm, y'know, Rillingham's. Very big way of business."

" Yes? "

" Very very big," said Sidney. " And developing all the time. Of course I'm only a junior partner, as yet. But everyone has to start some time. That's what Mr. Rillingham said when he gave me my partnership. ' It's only a junior one for the time being, Sidney,' he said. ' But say the word when you're ready—in your own time, mind—to come into the executive side, and we'll start grooming you for an equal partnership with me. Split the business fifty-fifty.' "

As he talked, Sidney had a vision of Mr. Rillingham standing in front of a mammoth factory, waving a plump hand towards it. Cars and wagons were moving in and out of the picture in the background, and Mr. Rillingham, smiling, held out a document with a blob of red sealing-wax in the corner.

" I have saw, have *seen*, your shop," said the Swiss girl. " On the corner from Rampart Road."

" *One* of our shops," Sidney corrected her. " As a matter of fact, that little old shop you saw is just kept on for interest reasons, see: sentimental, and all that. It was the original one, where the first Mr. Rillingham started the business, way back.'

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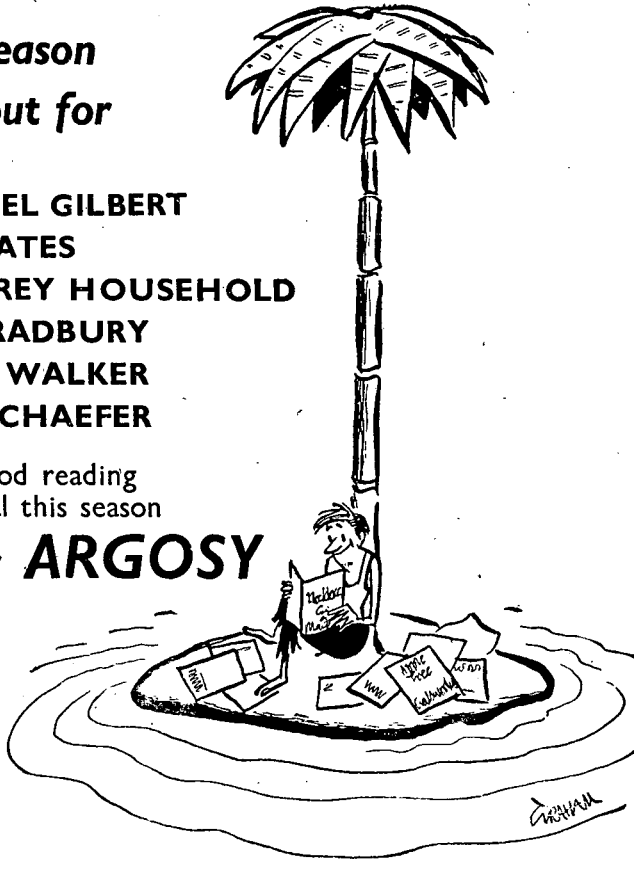
HOME OR AWAY

This season look out for

MICHAEL GILBERT
H. E. BATES
GEOFFREY HOUSEHOLD
RAY BRADBURY
DAVID WALKER
JACK SCHAEFER

Make good reading your goal this season

Order ARGOSY



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He felt pleased with that touch. "The *first* Mr. Rillingham" was good. "It's a big chain, now: shops all over. And up to date! You never saw anything like it. Equipment! Cor!"

Seized by a sudden idea, he looked at his watch. "Listen, to show you how up to date we are—" he said. "The shop'll be shut in ten minutes or so. Let's wait, give 'em time, and then you put a call through."

"Put a—"

"Go on, just to please me," he grinned. "I won't tell you, else it'd spoil the surprise. But if you telephone our place after shop-closing time, I guarantee you'll get quite a surprise."

The next half-hour passed quickly. Sidney put through a quick call and told Patty, who answered, that he was held up on a telly servicing job and wouldn't be back until after the shop closed. He would put the van away and see them again the day after Boxing Day. He hung up quickly, before she could bring up any objection to this, and went to work on the television set.

The job was, in fact, not a very long one, and he had everything neatly cleared up within the half-hour. "Now," he said, glancing at his watch. "That should've given them time to finish up and get clear, even if it *is* Christmas Eve."

"Does it work now?" the girl asked.

"Yes, yes," said Sidney. He turned knobs to reassure her, and a picture flashed on to the screen.

"Oh!" cried the girl. "It's Mel Chain! He is my best actor!"

"O.K., O.K.," said Sidney, feeling irritation welling up again. "Never mind for a moment. You've got all night to watch Mel—"

"I'm coming," said the girl. Contrite, she flashed him her smile.

Together they walked down the corridor. Sidney realised that this was the greatest moment of his life. This girl made Patty look like the big phoney she was. Her vital statistics might not be quite so striking, on paper, but Sidney knew that there was a lot to this business that never got on to paper.

He told the girl what number to dial, and stood by with a confident smile to watch her reaction. While he waited, he felt suddenly very fond of Rillingham's, as an idea, and even quite fond, or at least tolerant, of Mr. Rillingham. Even Patty, within her phoney limits, was probably not a bad sort of girl.

Patty, Mr. Rillingham. In the silence of the house, he could hear the telephone ringing at the other end.

"What goes on?" he demanded. There was a queer sinking sensation in his inside.

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The girl smiled at him, just the same as before, but in the colder atmosphere of the entrance hall it seemed to him that her smile was mechanical, something she could just flash on and off.

"Give," he said brusquely, and took the receiver from her. It was getting the ringing tone, right enough. What went on?

Had Mr. Rillingham, fool that he was, locked up the shop and gone out without setting the answering device? Surely he would never— But if there had been anyone in the shop, they would have answered it by now. Fools! They were gone, and the brilliant new device was not even in use. What was the good of—?

He stopped. Someone had picked up the receiver.

"Yes? Who is it?" The voice of Mr. Rillingham, sounding annoyed and rather flustered.

Sidney opened his mouth, then closed it again. No good giving himself away.

"This is Rillingham's Radio and TV Service," Mr. Rillingham barked. "We're closed. It's way after closing time and we're closed. Was there something important . . . hullo? *hullo*? HULLO!"

His voice was so full of anger that Sidney felt quite scared, even though he knew he was perfectly safe. He hung up quickly and looked round for the girl.

"It seems there's a slight technical—oh," he trailed off. The girl was opening the front door and a crowd of people were coming in. Mother, father, kids, dogs, parcels.

The girl was chattering away to the parents in a foreign language, the children were shrieking in English, and a small dog began to bark joyously.

"Oh, Crippen! Oh, stone the bleeding crows!" Sidney said to the silent telephone.

Observed by no one, he picked up his bag of tools and went out through the door. Then he got into the van and drove back to the shop through the Christmas traffic. Every time he stopped at the lights, he thought of Mr. Rillingham and Patty in the darkened, locked-up shop.

There were six traffic-lights in all, and by the time he got back to the shop, Sidney had had all he could take. He drove the van into its garage down the street, locked the garage, walked to the shop, let himself in with the key Mr. Rillingham didn't know he had had made—just because it irked him to be without a key—and strode noisily down between the counters. He did not snap on the lights because he hoped to catch Mr. Rillingham and Patty lying behind one of the counters or wedged behind Mr. Rillingham's desk.

There was nothing. They had gone, of course. He could just

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hear Mr. Rillingham saying to Patty, " Come on, let's get out of here before some other blinking deaf mute rings up," and the pair of them getting into Mr. Rillingham's car, slamming the doors, and gliding off, just as he had seen himself gliding with the Swiss girl.

Out of curiosity, he switched a light on and went over to look at the telephone-answering apparatus. Yes, Mr. Rillingham had left it correctly coupled to the instrument. That must have been his last action before going out and locking the door.

" An unsleeping secretary," said Sidney. " Big White Deal."

He uncoupled the apparatus and started the tape running. It repeated Patty's message, complete with deep tones and trans-atlantic intonation.

Sidney reversed the machine and erased the message.

Then he held the microphone to his mouth and said, " This is Rillingham's Television, Radio, and Music Shop. A Merry Christmas to all our customers. We regret to announce that we shall be going out of business as of even date. It was a good business but we killed it with our inefficiency. Good-bye for ever. It has been a pleasure to serve you."

When he had recorded his message, Sidney coupled the apparatus to the telephone in the correct manner, switched off the light, and left the shop. As he walked down the street he thought how glad he was that tomorrow was Christmas. He had been working too hard lately.

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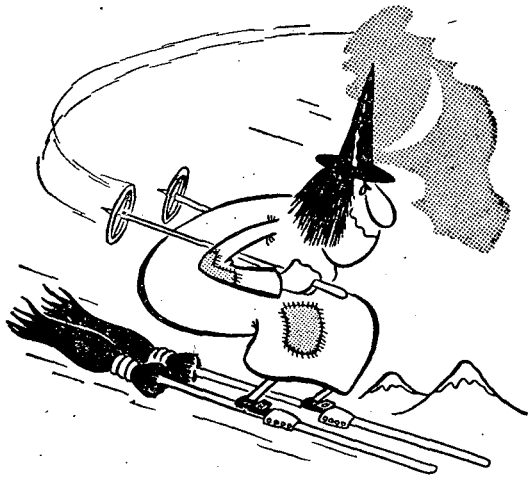

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H. E. BATES

THE PLACE WHERE SHADY LAY

ON THE fat black stove sat nearly a dozen loaves, each brown and new and warm and all shaped, with one exception, like haystacks. The exception was a very little one that sometimes looked rather like a mouse and sometimes rather like a pincushion and sometimes rather like a squatting toad staring across the darkening kitchen with two bright currant-black eyes.

He was very proud of that littlest one. He had made it himself. Soon he would pick the currants out and then eat the still-warm bread with a piece of new red cheese.

"Boy," Uncle Joe said. "Read us some o' the police court bits."

"Police court bits," Aunt Nancy said. "Police court bits. Police court bits."

Aunt Nancy was all red and shining as a radish from bending over the stove too much. The kitchen was all blue with pipe smoke and she was at war with it with a flapping towel.

"I wonder how either one o' you can find time for police court bits of a Friday," she said. "The week's gone a'ready. I know I never got no time."

Aunt Nancy never had time. The baking was hardly done and there were still six or more collars to iron and beeswax and still the violets to bundle and the oranges to sort from their papers.

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In the turn of a phrase he can create rich, rollicking comedy or deep, engulfing melancholy. Who? H. E. Bates, of course. Maybe no other writer alive today has such effortless variety of expression. Remember the donkey race that Pop Larkin organised in The Darling Buds of May? Remember the last visit to the little quince-tree island in Death of a Huntsman? Nobody else can get quite so much gaiety or despair on to a page.
To show what we mean we present a pair of new stories by H. E. Bates, each a wonderful example of his gift. One is a moving study of a legend's end, the other a new Uncle Silas story. Somebody once said that all English literary uncles were either wicked—like Richard III—or lovable—like Uncle Toby. Uncle Silas, the old shocker, succeeds in being both.

" And take your fingers off that there bread! It's too hot yet. You'll dream. You'll get nightmares."

Uncle Joe was a placid, tender man. He had a big thistle-grey moustache. He was smoking a pipe and drinking tea out of a big brown moustache-cup, with his elbows on the table. His head was white with curly hair that shone like fresh soapsuds. His spectacles were steel-rimmed and tied round the back of his head with waxy string.

" Ain't you going to read to me, boy? "

" I'm trying to find where the police court bits are."

" Generally on the back page, boy. Back page. Look on the back page." Uncle Joe had a flat green cart and a white clattering little pony. On Saturdays he drove the cart about the streets. A pair of big brass scales jangled up and down among skips of potatoes and carrots, cabbages and parsnips, rhubarb and onions. There was a scent of oranges and violets in the air and also, in the spring, of daffodils.

" Them oranges are a bad sample." Aunt Nancy was beeswaxing collars now. The iron sizzled fiercely when she spat on it. The collars shone like proud marble. " Half on 'em are 'tacked afore we start. If we see more'n a few 'eppence profit we'll be lucky."

" Found it yet, boy? "

" Is it where it says Petty Sessions? "

" That's it, boy. That's it. You got it now."

Uncle Joe blew contented smoke. He found it increasingly hard to read in the twilight and Aunt Nancy was always slow, even obstinate, about lighting the lamps. No sense in wasting light, she said. If you couldn't see you could always feel.

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" Elizabeth Emma Brown, 42, housewife, of 12 Pond Cottages, Little Harlow, was charged with stealing two quartern loaves, the property of Charles Mayhew, and further charged that on or about . . ."

" And put half on 'em in the swill-tub, I'll bet," Aunt Nancy said. " I see three half loaves in the swill-tub only yesterday. Enough bread to keep a family."

" What'd she get? " Uncle Joe said.

" If they had to bake it, like me, they'd think twice about wasting it. Nicking bread—that's a fine thing."

" It says fined ten shillings or in default seven days."

" They'll be lettin' 'em off scot free soon," Aunt Nancy said. " It's enough to make your blood rise."

" Lot o' cases this week, boy? "

Uncle Joe, puffing smoke, smacked his lips and juicily sucked at his moustache. He loved a lot of cases. The boy loved it too. A lot of cases meant that he could stay up long after the lamps were lighted. He could help to sort the oranges and make up bunches of violets surrounded with fresh collarettes of leaves. Strange blue eyes of mould shone from the rotting oranges under the golden lamplight and curious winey odours filled the night air.

" Charged with indecently assaulting a girl of fifteen, George Henry Parker, 42, said to be . . ."

" Read us the next bit, boy, read us the next bit."

Aunt Nancy attacked with a poker the frontal bars of the stove, making fire leap out. The black tip of the poker reeked with smoke and Aunt Nancy said, " They want this down their gullets, some on 'em. That'd cool 'em down. Well, I'm going to start them oranges, if nobody else ain't."

" Read us a bit more, boy. Read us a bit more."

It was getting harder and harder to read in the twilight. A dark April wind clattered against the leaves of a laurel tree in the garden outside and suddenly a cold spate of rain, almost hail, beat on the kitchen window.

" Charles Albert Baxter, of no fixed abode . . ."

" Who was that again, boy? Read that again."

Uncle Joe sat with mouth open, pipe expectantly poised aloft, face glowing in the stirred light of the stove. A moment later Aunt Nancy started noisily dragging a crate of oranges into the kitchen from outside the door, at the same time letting in even sharper sounds of April wind and rain.

A bang of the door and a ripping of orange-box wood twice drowned all words, so that Uncle Joe actually peered over the paper himself and said, " Baxter? No fixed abode? Is that what it says? "

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"That's it. That's what it says. Charles Albert . . ."

A look of great marvelling came over the face of Uncle Joe. An illumination far brighter than the mere reflection of firelight gave it a transcendental, beaming glow. A long silence wrapped him away for several minutes in reflective mystery and on the stove the little loaf that was sometimes like a mouse, at others like a pincushion, but most of all like a squatting toad, seemed to be watching, waiting, and listening.

"That's Shady all right," Uncle Joe said. The sudden rustle of the first of the orange papers was like the impatient striking of a match. "That's old Shady. What's he back for?"

"Shady Baxter?" Aunt Nancy said. "Not him?"

She stopped putting oranges into a big brown skip basket and sat merely twisting an orange paper into a spill with her fingers. "Not Shady?"

"That's Shady," Uncle Joe said and drew sharp moist air through his moustache in an uncanny whistle. "Old Shady—that's old Shady boy."

"The last time I saw him," Aunt Nancy said and now her voice had stopped sounding like hissing steam and was low and quiet, hardly more than a whisper, "was that day they took him away. I seen him handcuffed on the train."

"He was a big handsome chap," Uncle Joe said, "more'n six foot tall. Hair black as a rook. Bin a-soldiering in India some time and when he got back he's got one o' them big curly black moustaches. Like a pair o' bull's horns . . ."

It was already past midday. The little cart was clattering about the outskirts of the town. The last of the violets, in purple water-sprinkled bunches, had long since been sold. A dry April wind was blowing dustily about the street, swaying unopened buds of lilac trees in gardens and whipping into the pony's ginger mane.

"Could run like a hare. Like lightning. Once he run from here to Caxton Gibbet in a mite over one hour."

"How far is Caxton Gibbet?"

"Twenty miles or more. Might be twenty-five. I never bin there. I only heard talk on it."

The wind was behind them now. It seemed to be getting pony and cart along. It blew into the pony's tail, so that it fanned out sometimes, peacock-wise.

"A big man with his fists too. A big fighter. Champion o' this county. He won a belt once. They had it hanging up for weeks in The George and Crown. In a glass case. All gold."

The pony, scenting home, seemed to be running away with

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itself. Uncle Joe pulled on the reins. The pony fell into a sort of walking trot and in the cart the brass scale-pan fell over.

"Are we going home now? I'm hungry."

"If you're hungry, chew on this apple. It's got a scab or two on it but that won't slow poison you."

"Real gold?"

The apple was a sweet, russety one. It had a dry cold flavour.

"Real gold. He had his man like dead mutton from the start. They fought for twenty rounds. You should ha' seen his muscles. You know the big walnut tree? His arms were just like that."

Uncle Joe pulled on the reins again. The pony fell into a walk and Uncle Joe started to light his pipe, blowing strong blue smoke clouds.

"Aren't we going home?"

"If you ain't in a tearaway hurry," Uncle Joe said, "I was going to show you summat."

"About Shady?"

"Well, it ain't jistly like it used to be, but . . ."

Uncle Joe pulled on the left rein. The pony reared a fraction, tossing its head, and went resentfully past a row of cottages, a duck pond, and a field of sheep into a lane of budding hedgerows where speckled thrushes flew.

"You see that there rickyard?"

The rickyard was hard by a little spinney, a triangular one, of oak and hazel. There were no leaves on the oaks yet. Four or five strawstacks stood about the yard and the wind blew into them with swishing sea-sounds. It blew too at the branches of hazel catkins, already dying and dusty, the colour of old straw.

"This," Uncle Joe said, "is where they catched up with him."

Beyond the stacks was a low cow-hovel, brick-walled, with a roof of faggots. "He was in the hovel. He was sort of half layin', half hangin' up in the roof, so they said. Bin there for days. Like a bat—you know."

"What had he done? Why was he there?"

The pony was at a standstill now; it was puffing a little from running.

"Done a murder." Uncle Joe took his pipe from his mouth and looked at the stem. A piece of string was tied round the end of the stem. It gave his front teeth something extra to bite on. "Well, fust they said it was murder."

"He killed somebody? A man?"

"You got to remember," Uncle Joe said, "that he was a very proud feller, Shady. Proud as a turkey cock. You should ha' seen him walking up the street, dressed up, straight as a ramrod, them big shoulders back. He had a wonderful head of

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hair too. You know what a bull looks like? It was like that—all massed and curly."

"The man—who was he? Did he kill him with a gun?"

"No," Uncle Joe said. "Fightin'. A man named Willis, Archie Willis. He said to Shady he was finished, no good no more, said he was a washout. Shady made no more to do but offered him out and they started fightin'. In the finish Shady picked him up and throwed him up again' a wall. It broke his skull open. What would you have done, boy?"

"Why is he here now? In the police court?"

The pony was proving more than ever restless. It chipped with an impatient front hoof at the road.

"Perhaps he's been sleepin' rough. Very likely he ain't got the price of a bit o' bread or a night's doss on him. They can pull you for that."

"Couldn't he ask somebody for a piece of bread? Aunt Nancy says there's bread in the swill-tubs . . ."

Uncle Joe, pulling on a rein, started to turn the pony round in the road, its hoofs harsh on the dry metal.

"You never knowed Shady, boy. Shady'd be too proud to ask a thing like that. He was a terrible proud man, Shady. I'll be damned if he hadn't got summat to be proud about an' all. You know what? After he won that belt they'd have crowned him king if he'd let 'em. They would, boy—crowned him king."

A king with a crown and a belt of gold—Shady, the great runner, the great fighter, the great proud man.

"Gittup there," Uncle Joe said, making the pony break into impetuous cantering past the spinney of blowing oak and hazel. "Aunt Nancy'll be mad if we ain't there for pudden time."

By early evening the April wind was dying down. It no longer struck at the haystacks with swishing sea-sounds. The hazel catkins drooped, still and perpendicular, by the spinney side.

In his pocket the boy had the little loaf that was sometimes like a mouse, at others like a pincushion, but most of all like a toad with a pair of bright currant-black eyes.

It would be nice, he thought, if Shady, with nowhere to sleep, decided to come back to the hovel. The bread was just an idea. He hadn't eaten the loaf the night before because Aunt Nancy, in her shrilling, steamy way, kept saying it was too hot to eat at bedtime.

New bread was bad for little boys at bedtime. It made them dream. It gave them nightmares.

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The bread was quite cold now. It was also very hard and he didn't want it very greatly.

There was no Shady in the hovel. There was nothing there but a broken corn-drill, a pile of chaff, and a rusty length of corrugated iron. A mere whisper of wind blew now and then at the chaff, but that was the only sound.

It was silly, perhaps, to think that Shady might be there, but it was just an idea. He would like to have seen, just once, for a moment, the great Shady, the uncrowned king with a belt of gold.

Turning away from the hovel, across the rickyard, he paused for a moment to stare at a pile of sacks laid at the foot of the third of the strawstacks. There was something odd about the sacks. They had a big yellow swede-turnip lying in the centre of them. There was something odd about the turnip too. It sprouted pale elderberry-coloured shoots and the shoots, in turn, were held by a discoloured hand.

He wanted to say, "Hullo," to Shady. He wanted to say something about bringing him bread. But Shady, it seemed to him, was asleep. He was heavily embalmed under numbers of ragged sacks: two on his legs, another across his feet, two across his shoulders and another, like a hood, about his head. Wads of thick brown paper made a sort of waistcoat across his chest and several lengths of string held them in place there.

Two familiar objects stood out from this paralysed heap of rags and bones: the moustache, grey now, that was like a bull's horns and the frontal mass, matted and yellowish, of the curly, bull-like hair. There was no way of seeing the rest of the face. The head was drooped low, motionless either in sleep or thought, and the eyes were deep in shadow. It might have been, he thought, that a dead man was lying there.

At the gate of the rickyard he turned to look back. There was now nothing to tell, in the falling twilight, that a man was lying there at all. The wind made up the smallest of motions, mere whispers, in the straw.

After some moments he put the little loaf on the top rail of the gate and left it there. It looked more than ever, he thought, like a waiting, watching, listening toad.

When he turned again to look back from the side of the spinney the loaf too had become invisible in the April twilight. The sky was blue and clear and chilly. The wind had dropped completely and the strawstacks, so much the shape of the loaves that Aunt Nancy baked, stood as motionless as stones in a graveyard: marking in his mind, for ever, the place where Shady lay.

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H. E. BATES

SILAS ON THE WAGON

"FUST started to drink beer when I wur three," my Uncle Silas said. "Not all that big amount, mind you. Jist a pint for breakfast."

I confess it didn't surprise me very greatly that my Uncle Silas had set himself so early an example in the matter of drinking and I merely remarked, half to myself, in a casual sort of way, how useful that early training had turned out to be, since he'd been going at it with unbroken relish ever since.

"Jist wheer you're wrong, boy," he said. "Jist wheer you're wrong."

A rather worried and melancholy look came over his face as he said this: a mere glimmer of uncertainty, but significant. At the same time he wiped a small drop of moisture from his bloodshot eye and gave a mumbling sort of sigh, letting up a little wind.

"You're not trying to tell me," I said, "that you gave it up at some time or other?"

Before answering he leaned back against the haystack where we had been sitting all afternoon and stared at the sky, blue and feathered with late May cloud above the masses of high yellow oak flowers that crowned the spinney. Between us stood a clothes-basket full of cowslips, wilting in the genial warmth of

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afternoon. For over an hour we had been deflowering the golden-fingered heads and laying them out on an ebony-coloured tray to dry.

"Gospel truth," he said. "I give it up once, boy. Good and proper. Strike me down if I tell a lie. I went teetotal."

"For how long?" I said. "Five minutes?"

My Uncle Silas ignored me dreamily and for some moments longer went on deflowering one cowslip after another. The weight of memory seemed to bear down on him rather heavily, I thought, but finally he struck one knee of his corduroys with a stern and solemn palm.

"Prit near two months," he said. "Gospel. True as I'm a-sittin' here aside this 'ere haystack. Prit near two months, boy. Teetotal."

I remarked that it was a great wonder how he'd ever managed to survive the ordeal, but for nearly a minute he ignored that too. When he spoke again his eye was on the sky.

"It damn well wur an' all," he said. "Prit near the death on me."

After this the melancholy look came back to his face again and he gave another rather worried, weighty sigh.

"It wur cruel," he said. "Wuss'n being chained up. Wuss'n a nightmare."

I started trying to think of some possible explanation to account for this extraordinary lapse on my Uncle Silas' part and it came to me without difficulty.

"Nothing to do with women, I suppose?" I said.

My Uncle Silas slowly deflowered another cowslip.

"Two on 'em," he said. "They got round me, boy. They got round me. Two on 'em. Gal and her mother."

The notion of anyone getting round my Uncle Silas, still less putting him off his beer for two months, was almost too much to bear. I couldn't speak a word.

"Beautiful gal an' all," he said. "Beautiful."

He paused and held a pensive hand above the cowslips.

"Ever seen a big ripe pear 'anging in a muslin bag?"

I said of course I had. That was the way my Uncle Silas had the big golden Williams hanging every September on the house wall.

"Jist like that she wur," he said. "Firm and ripe. Like a nice ripe pear in a muslin bag."

"All ready for you to pick."

He took up another cowslip. Then, instead of deflowering it, he put it in his mouth and started reflectively chewing on the pale green stalk.

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"That's about what I thought," he said.

Cuckoos had been calling across the meadows all afternoon and now one flew over the haystack, chased by two more. My Uncle Silas watched them disappear beyond the oak trees with a bleary eye.

"Fust met her at a fair," he said. "Allus remember her. In a white muslin dress and a big white straw hat. Trying to win a clock on the hoop-la."

"With Ma?"

"With Ma," he said. He seemed to brighten a little, I thought, at the mention of Ma. A sprightlier glint came back to his eye. "Ma wur a good looker too, mind you. And only about thirty-five."

"Another pear?" I said.

"No," he said. "She wur more like a big yeller rose. A bit full blown."

Still chewing at the cowslip stalk, he went on to tell me what a poor mess the girl and her mother were making of the hoop-la and how, pretty soon, he was helping to put this right.

"In about half hour I'd got 'em a clock and all sorts o' fancy bits-o'-kit like vases and dolls and mustard pots and milk jugs and looking-glasses and I don't know what. It wur a warmish day and by the time I'd got 'em loaded well up I started to think it might be a good idea to have a wet or two at The Rose and Crown."

He laughed for the first time that afternoon and the cowslip fell out of his mouth as if in surprise.

"You mighta thought I'd suggested stranglin' the pair on 'em," he said. "Ma went white with 'orrer. The gal—Arabella her name wur—said, 'We do *not* drink, thank you. We have seen enough of *that*.' And in a lot less time than it takes to git a pint down they wur gone."

With renewed sadness my Uncle Silas started to deflower another cowslip.

"Well, I couldn't git this 'ere gal outa my mind," he said. "You know how it gits, boy. They start 'auntin' on you."

They lived in a keeper's cottage on the edge of the wood, the girl and her mother, he went on, and pretty soon he was trying to court her there. He didn't have all that lot of luck at first and it took him a week or more to find out why, in his own words, "They were so darnation ostropolus about a little thing like beer." Then he found out that the girl's father, a gamekeeper, had got as far as having D.T.'s about every three or four weeks and was now resting in a home for drunks on the other side of the county.

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" If you are coming to see Arabella," the mother said, " there must be no drink. Absolutely no drink. No talk of drink. We've been through purgatory enough already."

" Not half as much as I went through in the next five or six weeks, though, I'll tell you," my Uncle Silas said. " Wust time I ever remember. Terrible. Like being in a desert. Thought I'd go mad."

" But the girl," I suggested, " was nice? She was worth it? "

With thoughtful melancholy my Uncle Silas started to deflower another cowslip. " That wur the trouble," he said. " I wadn't gittin' much fur my money either."

I found it hard to reconcile this remark with my Uncle Silas' repeated description of the girl as a big juicy pear ripe for picking and I had actually started to say so when he pulled me up quite sharply.

" Ah, but you forgit Ma," he said. " Ma was allus there."

In the parlour, in the kitchen, in the garden, in the woods, across the meadows—Ma, it seemed, was always there.

" Never went quite so far as smelling me breath," Silas said, " but that wur the rough idea. I be damned if I could ever git the gal alone."

I could hardly believe that my Uncle Silas had utterly failed to find a way of removing the final obstacle to this frustrating state of affairs and I was quite relieved to hear him say, " Then I had a bit of inspiration. Bit of a brainwave. Very like it wur this teetotal business keepin' me 'ead oncommon clear for a week or two, but suddenly it come over me all of a pop what was up with Ma." I ran my hand through the clothes-basket and picked out a handful of juicy cowslip stems, at the same time watching Silas with an inquiring, crucial eye.

" Jealous," he said. " That wur the trouble with Ma."

Philosophically chewing on another cowslip stem, Silas expanded a little further on the theme that there are mothers who are sometimes uncommonly jealous of their handsome daughters.

" Arter all it wur a bit lonely for her," he said. " With 'im not there and she only thirty-five. Got to remember that."

I started to inquire how far this interesting discovery had carried him and he laughed for the second time that afternoon and said, " Arter that it wur easy. Plain sailing all the way. Decided I'd give it up. Rather have the beer than the gal. Hadn't got the gal anyway." This seemed, I thought, rather a disappointing end to an episode that I felt would itself ripen like a pear, but my Uncle Silas hadn't finished yet.

" One night I decided I'd nip off home and never come back,"

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he said, " but at the last minute I hadn't the heart to tell the gal. Damn it, she wur a beautiful gal, she wur."

Picking up another handful of cowslips, he went on to tell me how he said good night to the girl and her mother for the last time. It was summer and for some time after leaving there he walked up and down in the lane outside. " I wanted that gal very much," he said, and at last he could bear it no longer. He decided to go back to the house and see if he couldn't talk to her alone. " They were both in bed by that time," he said, " and I had to git a ladder and prop it up aside the house so as I could wake her."

He tapped softly on the window several times and called, " Arabella," and at last a figure in a white nightgown appeared.

" Arabella," he said, " I've got summat I must say to you."

" It's not Arabella," a voice whispered, " it's me."

My Uncle Silas was never one to lose his head on such occasions and he said quickly, " Ma, I jist wanted to tell Arabella I shan't be coming this way no more."

My Uncle Silas laughed softly.

" Thought she'd a fell outa the winder when I said that," he went on. " Thought she'd a shed a tear."

" Upset? "

" Terrible. Couldn't pacify her. Went on summat chronic —about how they liked me so much and how they'd miss me and all that. I wur so surprised I nearly fell off the damn ladder."

" Instead? "

He laughed softly again.

" She said wouldn't I come into the bedroom a minute and talk it over? So I nipped in for a minute or two." He was deflowering cowslips quite fast now, chuckling. " Matter of fact we talked it over fur the best part o' the night. Very understanding woman she turned out to be."

" And after that? " I said. " What about the girl? "

" Well," my Uncle Silas said, ruminating on the flight of two cuckoos in pursuit above the spinney, " we come to a sort of pact. I said I'd keep Ma from being too lonely fur a night or two if she'd leave me alone now and then with the gal."

The cuckoos, calling with throaty bubblings in the warm air, disappeared across meadows of buttercups, their voices echoing.

" Very useful ladder that wur," my Uncle Silas said. " Up one winder one night and the t'other the next." I had nothing to say and my Uncle Silas, laughing with a voice as soft and juicy as a full ripe pear, deflowered another cowslip.

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Mrs. Killick's Luck

by

Christina Fitzgerald

Christina Fitzgerald, born in 1950, is Argosy's youngest contributor yet. She is the kind of writer who, if there is nothing else to hand, writes stories on the bedroom wallpaper or the backs of exercise books. She has made a close study of grown-ups—*how* close, Argosy readers will soon see for themselves—with the idea of knowing what not to be when she grows up herself. When not writing stories she attends the Lycée Français in South Kensington. She is a granddaughter of E. V. Knox and a great-niece of Ronald Knox.

The story beginning on the opposite page was originally, in a somewhat shorter form, the winning entry in a competition for children run by a Sunday newspaper. Frederick Muller, the publisher, to whose attention it was called, was so impressed that he wrote to the authoress asking if she could enlarge her story into a book. *Mrs. Killick's Luck* is the result, and it's our luck too, to bring you these chapters.

Her book is sheer joy and we won't keep you from it any longer.

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AT THE BEGINNING of that country holiday in August, Tom and Penelope Jane believed that little Mrs. Killick was the nicest person in the world. She kept a shop called Rumbelow's Corner Stores on the corner of the green in the little village of Blacklebury.

Mr. Killick was dead so Mrs. Killick was very poor. To make more money she let the rooms above. Tom and Penelope Jane had come to stay without their parents.

" Please where is the bathroom," asked Tom. " We are very dirty."

" Here it is," she said leading the way down the passage a bit. The bath was cracked with lions paws. " I'm sorry the mat's dusty," she said shaking the pink mat out a bit.

Then they went downstairs to tea. They had it in a little room at the back of the shop. It was very cosy.

" Why haven't you had the sign changed? " asked Tom.

" Alas, I have no money to pay for it, rememer I am poor."

Next to the stores lived Mrs. Raton. She was very cross. She lived in a little cottage with a big garden. She was so mean that she wouldn't grow any grass but just grew flowers to sell. She made her husband go out after breakfast until lunch.

Penelope Jane and Tom heard Mrs. Raton saying, " I don't want you back before time old boy."

So poor old Mr. Raton had to go and sit on an old bucket and smoke and feed the hens.

Next to her lived the catman, Mr. Guts, who was very kind. He saved up odd pieces of fish for his cats or pussys, as he calls them. His cottage was rather cracked and could have done with a lick of paint.

Next to him was the pub. It was called the Golden Horse.

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Mrs. Raton was allways going into it. Next to the pub was the church. Mr. Killick was buried there in the churchyard. There were simple words inscribed upon his tomb said Mrs. Killick.

One night while Tom and Penelope Jane were having a bath, " What dirty bath water," said Tom stepping into a bathful of rusty brown water. " Shsh Tom," said Penelope Jane. " I think I hear somebody crying." " It must be Mrs. Killick."

" What is the matter Mrs. Killick? " asked Penelope Jane.

" Its allright," said Mrs. Killick. " Ecxept that we are terribly short of money." " We'll earn some money in the morning," said Tom trying to comfort poor Mrs. Killick who was sitting in the old arm chair.

The next day they tried the catman.

He was very helpfull. He gave them the job of taking to Persain kittens to a grand lord called Lord Eric Poshenuff. " They are for his grandchildren dearies," he said.

It was a long dreary walk to The Hall. Tom found it very hard to carry a kitten and wade through a lot of mud as he was only seven. Penelope Jane was nine. At last they got there. They stumbled up the marble stairs and knocked at the door.

A grand butler in scarlet-and-white uniform opened the door. " Who are you? " he asked. Penelope Jane explained everything. " Oh I see," he said. He led them into a stuffy drawing room. A maid was busy dusting the mantelpiece. " Betsy go and fetch the lord." The maid hurried out.

Soon the lord came in. "Are those my kittens darlings," he said " Thank you very much for bringing them." " Come and have a piece of chocolate cake."

" Thank you," said Penelope Jane. "And can I take home some of this delicious chocolate cake to poor Mrs. Killick." " Certainly my dear I am glad you like it as I cannot eat so much cake as I could fifty-five years ago. But just wait till I write a letter." He sat down at a writing desk. " Bring some ink and paper, Jenkins."

When he had finished writing he gave the letter to the children. " Take this to your landlady dears," he said handing them a rose-scent envelope. They hurried home to Mrs. Killick.

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It started to rain on the way back home so Penelope Jane put the letter and cake inside her mac. When they got home they gave the letter to Mrs Killick who wiped her plastic specetacles " I'll read it loud dearies. Its most likely a bill." This is what it said.

My dear Mrs. Killick,

In this letter I want to ask you a very important question. I want to offer you my hand in marriage. My housekeeper is very poty so I want you to come and house keep for me. I hope you will accept. You will be dressed in splenduor with a silken apron and a feather mattress. You will be married in the church. Yours richly

Lord Eric Poshenuff

When Mrs. Killick read this she fainted with joy. " Get a bucket of water Tom." " I'ts allright dearies, I'm allright." Mrs. Killick quickly got up and rushed to the telephone. She rang up the Lord number 1623. " I accept," she shouted down the telephone.

Next day they were married in the church. Mrs. Mrs Raton wasn't asked. They had tea in the pub afterwards.

The housekeeper was offended when Lord Poshenuff married. Her name was Mrs. Algrumbel.

The next day Lady P. went into Mrs Algrumbels room without knocking. She found her lying on a sofa grumbling. " Really, remember your motto," said Lady P. pointing to it on the wall, it said in gold letters " I am, I can, I ought, I will." " Shut up," mutered Mrs Algrumbel but Lady P didn't quite hear her as she was a bit deaf and anyway she couldnt believe her ears. " What did you say?" she asked. Mrs Algrumbel said quite loudly " I can't, I oughtent and I I won't do anything for you." Lady P storked half way out of the room. " Clear out of here," she said " and don't let me ever see you again." She slamed the door. Mrs Algrumbel packed her shabby suitcase and went down the back stairs through the kitchen gardens. There were jam-jars hanging on the trees for wasp traps and she nearly got stinged. Mrs Algrumbel made the gardeners boy take her suitcase to the Bus

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Stop on his wheelbarrow. Lady Poshenuff who was peering out of the window said " Good riddance off bad rubbish."

Mrs Algrumbel caught the 1 B to Newstun, she had to wait several hours for the train but she past the time thinking about Lady P. In the train she muttered about niminy-piminy Lady P. The other people in the train didn't know what to think.

After Mrs. Killick was married she got above herself. Lord Poshenuff was rather surprised. His poty housekeeper had let things get rather out of hand so he hoped the new Lady Poshenuff would order a decent lunch. But she would not daign to speak to the cook as she was so grand. When the cook asked what sort of jam tarts they should have she said " Just jam jam tarts." She had forgotten about her humble origins and also about her stores and her having to rent the top room. The lord also asked where the tomatoes had come from as they seemed a bit off.

" I think they are out of the vegtable garden but of course it isn't my job to look," said Lady Poshenuff.

Lord Poshenuff thought he had better show her round the house. He showed her some tapistries in a long room.

" These were made by my great uncle in 1670," he said. " All the men in my family can sew very nicely. I can mend socks and I can take tucks in the sleeves of my shirts to make them a bit shorter."

" That's a good thing," said Lady Poshenuff " because I don't know how to sew as I was so busy looking after my little shop."

Lord Poshenuff opened the door of another room. " It's dusty in here because I don't like people meddling with my things," he said " I keep all my money in here as I don't trust the bank. It is in that large box."

" Where is the key? " asked the new Lady Poshenuff.

" I keep it under my mattress. It is a spring interial mattress." Lady Poshenuff looked rather disappointed because she wanted it straigt away.

They saw all the other rooms. The drawing room had real chinese wallpaper with red roses butterflies and parrets on it. It was rather faded. Large sofas and costly furnature stood about in the rooms. The curtin rods had large brass balls on the ends of them which were turning green because the housekeeper counl'dnt reach them and there was never enough of Brasso's Polish to do them. Afterwards they went up on the roof by a step ladder from the bathroom. Lady Poshenuff felt very giddy and clutched at things like battelments which were all round the edge.

" Look out, the slates are a bit thin here," said Lord Poshenuff. " All these are my lands," he said pointing to the green feilds

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" only there is not much grazing as it is all let out to stingey farmers."

For dinner they had chicken, roast beef, lamb, roast potatoes mashed potatoes peas broad beans out of the garden. They had cold puddings otherwise it would all have meant too much cooking on a hot day. There was pink blomonge, jelly, cold jam roly poly and cold suet pudding. " Someone's hungry," said the cook as she pushed the trolly down the dirty marble passages. They also had sherry champane red wine and white wine. Lady P. preferred tea but she thought it grander to have champane. There was no cheese and biscuits. There was a large silver biscuit tin but it was empty. The poty housekeeper never filled it as she said it attracted mice. (She was scared of them really and she was always buying and putting traps.) Half the dinner was left over and had to be finished up the next day. They got absolutely sick of the suet pudding.

When Mrs. Algrumbel got to London she thought she would go and stay with her sister-in-law. Mr. had died many years ago. " He has passed beyond the pale," Mrs. Algrumbel often said. But she was glad really because he had been a nuisance. Miss Ellen Algrumbel was his sister and she was still alive and she lived in Hampstead. Mrs. Algrumbel had only been to London once before and she was very worried by the Underground and she got her umbrella caught in the moving staircase. At last she got to Hampstead and she walked down Fitzjohns Avenue to her sister-in-laws flat. She ringed the bell and Miss Ellen Algrumbel poked her nose out. " I hope you haven't come to stay for long," she said. Mrs. Algrumbel was rather a bit taken aback but she said it was just for the time being.

Miss Algrumbel was rather thin and had a long thin nose and cheap wire spectacles. She was allways changing her library books. She was very tidy. She allways wore plastic gloves when she did the washing up. And she had a plastic thing to cover her hat when it rained and plastic boots with buttons.

She was very religious and went to a lot of committees and it got worse as she grew older. She had no spare room as she used it to put things in that she was saving up for Bazaars. So Mrs. Algrumbel had to sleep in the drawing room. There was a camp bed there and as there was no blankets she had a large blue curtain and an overcoat instead. They kept slipping of in the night. The walls of the drawing room were painted cream and there was a very religeous picture of black and white and Chinese children going up from steps and each time you put some money in the Missionary Box you were allowed to move the

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baby up a step. And Mrs. Algrumbel stood on a wobly camp bed and moved all the babies up and never put anything in the box.

In the morning Miss Ellen Algrumbel took the overcoat off the camp bed and went out to do some good work. She came back very tired, " I don't know why you go if it makes you so tired," said Mrs. Algrumbel snapily. "Ah the poor people miss me so much," Miss Ellen said.

Then they potered about and had a tin of Baked Beans. They would have liked fish and chips but they thought it would be common to go to the shop. Miss Ellen just lived on her old age pension but she had saved up a good bit.

One day Miss Ellen got very excited and said she was having a few ladies in. She got out some very thin china cups with MADE IN HONG KONG in the bottom to show they were china. Also she got out some tin spoons. They were a bit eggy as they had not been washed properly. Then she got out some biscuits that were very stale because they were only got out when the ladies came in. And afterwards she put them back for the next time. The ladies all came and talked very dully. One of them said it was unusually cold for the time of the year. Another said she was late because the bus went a different way now because of the housing estate. Mrs. Algrumbel was very rude to them. Presently they got a bit sleepy and one lady said " I'm afraid its time for Blanket Bay." So they all went away and Miss Ellen put on her plastic washing up gloves and washed up and put the biscuits that were left over back in the tin. The tin had a picture of Windsor castle on it. Miss Ellen was really very kind and she wanted to give Mrs. Algrumbel a treat, so they took a trip into London and some of the ladies came too.

Mrs. Algrumbel wanted to look nice as she thought it would be a gay outing. She put on a plastic necklace which she thought

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was pearl, a grey skirt, a white cotton blouse and a blue coat with large buttons and a pair of dark red shoes. When they were in the bus Mrs. Algrumbel was rather disappointed as they only went to the Victoria and Albert Museum. It was very dreary outside and there were large puddles and lots of yellow leaves falling into them.

"What is the best thing to see my man," asked Miss Ellen rapping sharply on the polished desk. The man said the best thing to see was Typhoo Shabs Tiger. He only said it to get rid of them.

Mrs. Algrumbel got stuck in the turnstile and they had to heeve her out. She would go in through the one that said OUT. For a long time they walked about hard marble passages.

They could not find Typhoo Sahb's Tiger then they found it. It was near the Refreshment room and the Ladies Cloak-room. It was a model of a tiger in a glass case, it was life size eating a man with a hat on. It had a sort of Musical box inside it that made it wheaze and groan. All the ladies were terribly frightened and actually it was not very suteable. Some of them fainted.

Mrs. Algrumbel did not faint but she gave the tiger a poke with her umbrella and it stopped working.

An attendant rushed up, he was very forign, "Do not touch ze articles," he shouted. He was very angry. "Be quiet you impertinet little man," said Mrs. Algrumbel; "You ought to be put in a glass case as well." Mrs. Algrumbel soon got rather tired of living with her sister in law. She wondered what to do next. Then one day when she was looking through her pockets she found a rusty key. And she remembered it was key of Lord Poshenuff's chest of money.

She thought it might be a good idea to go back to the hall and steal the money because

1. She was getting rather short.

2. She couldn't get another job as none of them were grand enough for her.

Of course Mrs. Algrumbel knew that it would be very wrong to steal. But she had been badly brought up and anyway she thought Lord Poshenuff was so rich that it wouldn't make much difference.

She didn't tell Miss Ellen what she meant to do because Miss Ellen was so religous.

Meanwhile Tom and Penelope Jane were still on their holidays. And as they could not stay at Mrs. Killick's shop with no-one to

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Mrs. Algrumbel did not faint but she gave the tiger a poke with her umbrella . . .

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look after them their Mother said they could stay at the Golden Horse. Tom and Penelope Jane liked it very much at the inn.

"Why don't we go and see Lady Poshenuff?" asked Tom. "She is only little Mrs. Killick really and she cannot have forgotten the old days in Rumbelows Corner Stores already." "I don't know if we could go," said Penelope Jane. "You have holes in your socks and you're not aloud to wear your school ones in the holidays." Penelope Jane was rather bossy. However Tom pulled his socks down so the holes did not show and he didn't look so bad when he washed his face which he never did usually. So they went of to the Hall to call on Lady Poshenuff. "I exspext she will be very pleased to see us," said Tom as they went in through the grand iron gates.

Halfway up the drive they saw an old man in a cap and blue dungarees and he was putting gravel into the holes in the drive to fill them up a bit.

"Please, we came to see Lord Poshenuff," said Penelope Jane thinking it was the odd-job man. "I am Lord Poshenuff," said the old man and sure enough it was the Lord as he was fond of messing about in his spare time. He was very kind and took them up to the house.

They went in by the back door as that was the quickest way. The back passage was covered with a worn out red carpet, Lord Poshenuff hurridly said he was going to get a new one. One of the doors was open and the children could see a delicious tea layed out.

They could see a silver tea-pot, a large plum cake, a plate of chocolate biscuits, jam tarts, currant buns, donuts, and brown and white bread and butter, Lady Poshenuff was sitting in there but she got up and came out.

"My dear here are two little visitors," said the lord timidly, "I exspect they would like some tea."

But Lady Poshenuff was very angry, "Go away," she said, "you must wait until I have finished my tea." And she slamed the door. Lord Poshenuff felt rather arkward so he went and hid in his study (It was not a study really he just sat there and looked at the bills). And they decided to go back to the Inn at once. Afterwards Penelope Jane wrote a poem all about the diferent kinds of dissapointments and here it is:

1. Dissapointment, dissapointment,
   We went to pay a call
   Dissapointment, dissapointment
   It was not nice at all.
2. Dissapointment Dissapointment
   The whole world we've been round

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Dissapointment Dissapointment
No treasure have we found.
3. Dissapointment Dissapointment
We went to have a treat
Dissapointment Dissapointment
There was no food to eat.

One of the nice things about the Inn was that Penelope Jane and Tom were aloud to stay up to proper dinner in the evening. And it was written on a Menu in ink. And the menu from the day before was on the back, but it was crossed out. And that night the Menu was

Menu

Oxtail Soup or Vegtable Soup

Roast Chicken or Sausadges
Brussel Sprouts or Peas
Roast or Boiled Pots

Blomonge or Fruit Salad

Custerd

"Pots" was short for potatoes. Penelope Jane sometimes helped write out the menus as she had very nice writing. While they were having dinner a mysterious visitor arrived at the Inn. It was a man with a long beard and baggy trousers with bicicle clips and long lether boots. He said his name was Mr. Doe.

Penelope Jane and Tom watched him closely. "There's something queer about him," said Tom "he keeps getting his beard in the soup."

After a bit his beard got so wet he had to squeeze it out and it was very dissgusting. Unfortunately it was now the childrens bed time. Penelope Jane had to go to bed at the same time as Tom, which was not fair because she was older . . .

Now we will see what was happening up at the Hall. Lord Poshenuff had hoped when he maried everything would be very nice and comfertable. But soon Lady Poshenuff wanted to changed everything. She got a magazine every now and then and it told her what was in the fashion. First of all she said all the furniture was old-fashioned. "It must go," she said. Lord Poshenuff found her dragging a huge sofa out into the hall. The sofa was full of mice. Lord P. was rather dismaid as it had had belonged to his great-uncle. "I often sat on it when I was a boy," he said. But Lady Poshenuff said not to be silly and help

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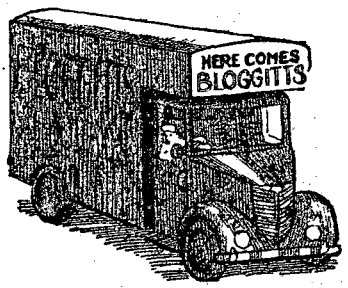
push. Lord Poshenuff panted rather as he was not really as young as he had been. Then Lady Poshenuff started to lift a glass bird case of a black cabinet. The cabinet had sherry and champane glasses in it The bird case was full of different coloured birds. Lord Poshenuff had got them when he was in Kenya. He was very proud of them and used to show them to his friends when they came to play bridge. He told her this but she took no notice.

Then she heaved out three more chairs and a card table. Last of all she took two armchairs out.

The next day she told Jenkins the butler to fetch a ladder so that she could climb up and unscrew the big golden balls and take down the curtains. Those belonged to his uncle as well but he didnot tell Lady P. because as he knew it would be no use. Lord Poshenuff got more and more dipressed. "What are we going to sit on," he asked. His friends often came in the evening to play a game of cards and he used to go in to the kitchen to cut them ham sandwiges. He thoght how embarrising it would be if they had to sit on the floor. And sometimes he wished he hadn't married at all.

However Lady Poshenuff ordered a van to take the furniture away and when it came it was a big blue one with HERE COMES BLOGGITS on the front and on the back it said THERE GOES BLOGGITS.

Lord Poshenuff was very sad when it was taken away because he had invited Colonel Grumkins and Major Scew-wiff and Captain Martingale to play bridge in the drawing room but there was no furniture in it. So as soon as Lady Poshenuff had gone out to see Duchess of Pattypan about the new furniture he went up to his bedroom and fetched 4 chairs and a table. Then he rushed into the attic and fetched a rug with polar bears on it which



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was very unsuitable but it was the only one he'd got. Then he got his bedside table and put that in the drawing room then he cut the sandwidges and put them on a plate. After he had put them on the table he rushed up stairs to change into his best suit. When they came they helped themselves to ham sandwidges and started to play. It wasn't much fun really because Major Scew-wiff and Captain Martingale allways won.

After they had finished the game they went into the kitchen and drank beer. Lord Poshenuff wished they would go because it was ten o'clock and Lady Poshenuff would be back any minute now. At last Major Scew-wiff and Colonel Grumkins said they would go but Captain Martingale stayed on. At last he went too. As soon as he had gone Lord Poshenuff put all the furniture back in its place. Then he popped the plate back in the cupboard without washing (which I'm sure Mrs. Allgrumbel would never approved of.) Then he got into his striped pyjamas and went to bed. He heard his wife come in at half past twelve but he pretended to be asleep.

The next morning Lady Poshenuff rushed in saying that Bloggits van would be coming at ten o'clock. Lord Poshenuff wondered what would come out of it. When it came a man stepped out and opened the back. Then he started pulling out feeble-looking chairs with imatation cushions on them. The table was very large and shiny with three flimsy legs. Then she pulled out a large roll of cloth and many other things. "That will be 102 guineas," said the man.

"I will go up and fetch it from my chest," said Lord Poshenuff. He went up stairs to get it out but when he opened it he found nothing in it. He went downstairs again and told the man this. Lady Poshenuff fainted and the man was cross. Lord Poshenuff told the man he'd pay tomorrow and told Betsy the parlour maid to fetch a glass of water for Lady Poshenuff. She soon came round and went to ring the police up and she didn't know the number or anything because she didn't usually dain to ring up. So Jenkins had to come to help her. And all the time she kept howling "Oh my money Oh my money."

Lord and Lady Poshenuff and the police had no idea where the money had gone to but this is where its gone. While Lord Poshenuff was playing bridge with his friends Jenkins had slipped out to the Golden Horse. He left the back door a bit so that he could get back quickly without being noticed. Now as soon as Jenkins got to the pub the mystrous Mr. Doe creeped up the drive and poped into the open back door. Because Mr. Doe was really Mrs. Allgrumbel and she was dressed up in the old clothes her

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sister-in-law had colected for the Bazar, and she had got the beard out of the Dressing Up Box for the Nativity Play and it was Joseph's beard really. And of course Mrs. Allgrumbel knew all about Jenkins sliping and sloping out to the pub because she had often been angry about it when she was at the Hall. So she knew the door was open and in she poped.

The kitchen at the Hall was very big and high with a huge wooden table and an Aga which you could sit on in cold weather. There was a cold partridge on the table which Lord P. had shot and he was looking forward to having it for lunch to-morrow so Mrs. Allgrumbel nibbled at it a bit. Then she saw the shopping list hanging on a hook and it said:

½ lb. of Murray mints
2 lbs. of butter
A packet of Daz
A turkey
7 lbs. of potatoes
1 pot of Marmalade
1 packet of Sugar
2 tins of treacle
1 lb. cooking apples
Pay Furniture Bill

and Mrs. Allgrumbel took a pencil out of a saucer on the dresser and she changed it to :

½ lb. of Mud
2 lbs. of sea-weed
A packet of worms
A blackbird
7 lbs. of stones
1 pot of earth
1 packet of sand
2 tins of sea-water
1 lb. of dust
Pay Mrs. Allgrumbel

Then she put back on the hook again. Then she went into the larder and took out the trolly. She pushed the trolly to the stairs and went quietly up. Lord and Lady Poshenuff were in the library. Lord Poshenuff was reading The Times and Lady Poshenuff was reading a panphlet on New Furniture. They heard the trolly but they thought it was the cook bringing them their supper. She only brought it when she was in a good mood. Mrs. Allgrumbel knew this so she knew she was safe. She had seen the cook go to the Golden Horse as well so she was safe from her too. When Mrs. Allgrumbel got to Lord Poshenuff's room she opened the door very slowly and peered in. Then she felt in her

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pocket for the key and for a moment she thought she had left it at the Golden Horse then she found it in a back pocket of her dungarees. She put the key in the lock and turned it, it made a terrible noise because it had not been oiled for years. Lord and Lady Poshenuff did not come up because they thought it was the cook singing.

Mrs. Allgrumbel took out the bag of money and with great difficulty carried it down the stairs. This time Lord and Lady Poshenuff thought it was the maid dropping the spoons and forks. At the bottom of the stairs she heaved it on to the trolly, and pushed it right through the kitchen and out of the back door. This was the worst part of all for Lord and Lady Poshenuff because they thought the cook was taking supper away again. She pushed it down the drive which was a gravel one with conker trees down the side of it. Luckily it was not raining so there were no puddles but some of the conkers fell on her head. She left the trolly just outside the Golden Horse and heaved the bag of money up to her room and hid it under the bed. No-one heard her because there was such a noise in the bar.

When the cook and the butler came out of the Golden Horse they felt rather confused because they had had a drop too much. They fell over the trolly. They swared loudly. "What this doing" shouted Jenkins as he bundled the cook on to the trolly and pushed it to the Hall. Lord and Lady Poshenuff felt like crying because they had been waiting all this time for their supper, and it had never come. The next day was when they found the money was missing. So all togetherer it was a unhappy day at the Hall.

Of course when Mrs. Allgrumbel had got the money she had to get away from Blackleberry. There was only one train a day to London and she had to get it, so she asked the pub to ring up a taxi. But there was only one taxi in the village and that was being used for a very sad funeral. It was the proprieter of the Fish and Chip Van because his van had blown up and he was greatly missed. So the taxi was out all day.

Mrs. Allgrumbel felt a bit desprate and she said to Penelope Jane, "My dear, will you drive me to the station as I have some rather heavy luggage." Penelope Jane was allways very helpfull and she said yes. Tom was allowed to come too and hold the whip sometimes as long as he didn't hit Polly with it. As they went along the road became a bit bumpy and the bag of money began to jingle. "Mind out!" screamed Mrs. Allgrumbel and she forgot she was supposed to be Mr. Doe really and her voice was very sqeeky. Penelope Jane was surprised.

"Mr. Doe is getting a bit odd," she said to Tom. Then

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there was another bump and Mrs. Allgrumbel's beard started coming loose. She clutched at it with both hands. Tom and Penelope peered at her. Just at this moment Lord Poshenuff drove by in his Rolls Royce. " I've lost my money " he shouted to the children, " Have you seen it anywhere? " Penelope Jane said carmly, " We have this man Mr. Doe in our pony trap and we think there's something odd about him as his beard is coming off." Lord Poshenuff swared loudly.

" It's Mrs. Allgrumbel, my poty old house-keeper," he shouted. "And this is your money! " said Tom, because at that moment the bag collapsed and 2/6ds rolled all over the place.

Of course Lord Poshenuff was delighted when he saw the money. He kept saying Thank-you thank-you. Then they all went back to the Hall to-gether. Mrs. Allgrumbel who was feeling rather silly had to go with Lord Poshenuff in his Rolls Royce. She wished she had never started the scheme but had just stayed with her religious sister-in-law.

When they were at the Hall they took Polly to the stables and she was put in a huge great stall full of rusty bits and spurs which Lord Poshenuff had used when he was in the Dragoons. Penelope Jane gave her some hay. There was a clock in the stable yard and the yard was covered with mossy green bricks. When they got indoors Lady Poshenuff was scolding Mrs. Allgrumbel and using frightfull words but Lord Poshenuff was very kind and he was so pleased to get the money back that he said " Don't lets send her to prison, lets have tea at once." So he ringed the bell and Jenkins brought in hot buttered toast.

And the next day Lord Poshenuff took Penelope Jane and Tom to buy a pony each for their own as a reward. And Lord Poshenuff said he would keep them in the stables until they were wanted in the holidays. He also gave them a box of toffees and a pound note each.

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star light, star bright . . .

And lest our leap from the Skie should prove too far
We slide on the back of a new-falling Star.
And drop from above
In a Gelly of Love !

JOHN DRYDEN, *Tyrannick Love*

When the curtains of night
Are pinned back by the stars
And the beautiful moon sweeps the sky,
I'll remember you, Love,
In my prayers.

When the curtains of night
Are pinned back by the stars,
And the dew drops of heaven kiss the rose,
I'll remember you, Love,
In my prayers.

American Ballad

Charming Stars

What you say is true, *said she*, I love the Stars, there is somewhat charming in them, and I could almost be angry with the Sun for effacing 'em. I can never pardon him, *I cry'd*, for keeping all those Worlds from my sight: What Worlds, *said she*, looking earnestly upon me, what Worlds do you mean? . . . Alas, *said I*, I am asham'd, I must own it, I have had a strong Fancy every Star is a World. I will not swear it is true, but must think so, because it is so pleasant to believe it: 'Tis a fancy come into my head, and is very diverting. If your folly be so diverting, *said the Countess*, pray make me sensible of it.

BERNARD DE FONTENELLE, *A Plurality of Worlds*

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In Stars Entangled

With our own vanishing voices as we go
By the stream side, watching our shadows dangled
Down the bank to the flood, trailed in the flow
And all in stars entangled

There is the hunter hulking up the night
Who waded once the wildest of our seas,
With foiled eyes marking the still flight
Of the faint Pleiades

And here are we, who hold each other now
So nearly, that our welded shadows seem
There where they fall away, a ghostly prow
Steering into the stream.

As if to kiss were someway to embark;
As if to love were partly to be spent,
And make of us a hostage to the dark.
If so, I am content . . .

RICHARD WILBUR, *Flumen Tenebrarum*

Lovers' Code

"Look at Orion—like some secret heavenly diagram," said Lisby at the open door, because she had no word of comfort for him . . . If only Brenda would come out for a moment and be very sweet in that way she had of being responsive to another's mood! She could have given him something to take away with him, some cryptic remark, that he could dwell upon and cherish . . . He looked up at the heartbreaking glitter of Orion, so serene, so triumphant above the tortured world. "A lover might use it as a code," he said, almost under his breath. "Abelard signing his letters to Heloise."

He looked down at her, hesitating a moment, as if there were something he wanted to say. And then, with a sigh, he turned away. As he looked back at the gate to salute her, the little tree in his hand caught the starlight and shone with a faint blue fire.

FRANCES TOWERS, *Tea With Mr. Rochester*

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Starry-Eyed

On top of old Smokey, all covered with snow
I lost my true lover from courting too slow.
Now courting's a pleasure, but parting is grief
And a false-hearted lover is worse than a thief.
They'll hug you and kiss you and tell you more lies
Than the cross-ties on the railroad or the stars in the sky.

American Ballad

Sailors' Guides

The sky was black, black as velvet, the black north had come down, and the stars shone and burned as if the wind reached and fanned them into flame.

Large Sirius flashed, vast Orion strode the sky, lording the heavens with his sword. A scintillation rushed across from the zenith to the southern horizon. The black north held down the buds, but there was a force in them already that must push out in leaf as Arcturus rose in the east.

"I should like to go straight to the real great sea like the wind," said Mark.

"We *must* go to the great sea," said Bevis. "Look at Orion."

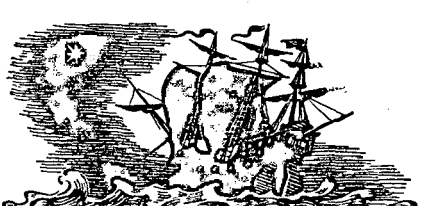
The wind went seawards, and the stars are always over the ocean.

RICHARD JEFFERIES, *Bevis*

Morning Star

Eyes like the morning star,
Cheek like a rose,
Laura was a pretty girl,
God Almighty knows.
Weep, all ye little rains,
Wail, winds, wail,
All along, along, along
The Colorado trail.

American Ballad



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★ *By special request, a reprint of that masterly story*

THE FACTS OF LIFE

by W. Somerset Maugham

IT WAS Henry Garnet's habit on leaving the city of an afternoon to drop in at his club and play bridge before going home to dinner. He was a pleasant man to play with. He knew the game well and you could be sure that he would make the best of his cards. He was a good loser; and when he won was more inclined to ascribe his success to his luck than to his skill. He was indulgent, and if his partner made a mistake could be trusted to find an excuse for him.

It was surprising then on this occasion to hear him telling his partner with unnecessary sharpness that he had never seen a hand worse played; and it was more surprising still to see him not only make a grave error himself, an error of which you would never have thought him capable, but when his partner, not unwilling to get a little of his own back, pointed it out, insist against all reason and with considerable heat that he was perfectly right.

But they were all old friends, the men he was playing with, and none of them took his ill-humour very seriously. Henry Garnet was a broker, a partner in a firm of repute, and it occurred to one of them that something had gone wrong with some stock he was interested in.

"How's the market today?" he asked.

"Booming. Even the suckers are making money."

It was evident that stocks and shares had nothing to do with Henry Garnet's vexation; but something was the matter; that was evident too. He was a hearty fellow, who enjoyed excellent health; he had plenty of money; he was fond of his wife and devoted to his children. As a rule he had high spirits, and he laughed easily at the nonsense they were apt to talk while they played; but today he sat glum and silent. His brows were crossly puckered and there was a sulky look about his mouth.

Presently, to ease the tension, one of the others mentioned a

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subject upon which they all knew Henry Garnet was glad to speak.

"How's your boy, Henry? I see he's done pretty well in the tournament."

Henry Garnet's frown grew darker. "He's done no better than I expected him to."

"When does he come back from Monte?"

"He got back last night."

"Did he enjoy himself?"

"I suppose so; all I know is that he made a damned fool of himself."

"Oh. How?"

"I'd rather not talk about it if you don't mind."

The three men looked at him with curiosity. Henry Garnet scowled at the green baize.

"Sorry, old boy. Your call."

The game proceeded in a strained silence. Garnet got his bid, and when he played his cards so badly that he went three down not a word was said. Another rubber was begun and in the second game Garnet denied a suit.

"Having none?" his partner asked him.

Garnet's irritability was such that he did not even reply, and when at the end of the hand it appeared that he had revoked, and that his revoke cost the rubber, it was not to be expected that his partner should let his carelessness go without remark.

"What the devil's the matter with you, Henry?" he said. "You're playing like a fool."

Garnet was disconcerted. He did not so much mind losing a big rubber himself, but he was sore that his inattention should have made his partner lose too. He pulled himself together.

"I'd better not play any more. I thought a few rubbers would calm me, but the fact is I can't give my mind to the game. To tell you the truth I'm in a hell of a temper."

They all burst out laughing.

"You don't have to tell us that, old boy. It's obvious."

Garnet gave them a rueful smile.

"Well I bet you'd be in a temper if what's happened to me had happened to you. As a matter of fact I'm in a damned awkward situation, and if any of you fellows can give me any advice how to deal with it I'd be grateful."

"Let's have a drink and you tell us all about it. With a K.C., a Home Office official, and an eminent surgeon—if we can't tell you how to deal with a situation, nobody can."

The K.C. got up and rang the bell for a waiter.

"It's about that damned boy of mine," said Henry Garnet.

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Drinks were ordered and brought. And this is the story that Henry Garnet told them.

The boy of whom he spoke was his only son. His name was Nicholas and of course he was called Nicky. He was eighteen. The Garnets had two daughters besides, one of sixteen and the other of twelve, but however unreasonable it seemed, for a father is generally supposed to like his daughters best, and though he did all he could not to show his preference, there was no doubt that the greater share of Henry Garnet's affection was given to his son.

He was kind, in a chaffing, casual way, to his daughters, and gave them handsome presents on their birthdays and at Christmas; but he doted on Nicky. Nothing was too good for him. He thought the world of him. He could hardly take his eyes off him.

You could not blame him, for Nicky was a son that any parent might have been proud of. He was six foot two, lithe but muscular, with broad shoulders and a slim waist, and he held himself gallantly erect; he had a charming head, well placed on the shoulders, with pale brown hair that waved slightly, blue eyes with long dark lashes under well-marked eyebrows, a full red mouth, and a tanned, clean skin. When he smiled he showed very regular and very white teeth.

He was not shy, but there was a modesty in his demeanour that was attractive. In social intercourse he was easy, polite, and quietly gay. He was the offspring of nice, healthy, decent parents, he had been well brought up in a good home, he had been sent to a good school, and the general result was as engaging a specimen of young manhood as you were likely to find in a long time. You felt that he was as honest, open, and virtuous as he looked.

He had never given his parents a moment's uneasiness. As a child he was seldom ill and never naughty. As a boy he did everything that was expected of him. His school reports were excellent. He was wonderfully popular, and he ended his career, with a creditable number of prizes, as head of the school and captain of the football team.

But this was not all. At the age of fourteen Nicky had developed an unexpected gift for lawn tennis. This was a game that his father not only was fond of but played very well, and when he discerned in the boy the promise of a tennis player he fostered it. During the holidays he had him taught by the best professionals and by the time he was sixteen he had won a number of tournaments for boys of his age. He could beat his father so badly that only parental affection reconciled the older player to

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the poor show he put up. At eighteen Nicky went to Cambridge and Henry Garnet conceived the ambition that before he was through with the university he should play for it.

Nicky had all the qualifications for becoming a great tennis player. He was tall, he had a long reach, he was quick on his feet and his timing was perfect. He realised instinctively where the ball was coming and, seemingly without hurry, was there to take it. He had a powerful serve with a nasty break that made it difficult to return, and his forehand drive, low, long, and accurate, was deadly. He was not so good on the backhand and his volleying was wild, but all through the summer before he went to Cambridge Henry Garnet made him work on these points under the best teacher in England.

At the back of his mind, though he did not even mention it to Nicky, he cherished a further ambition, to see his son play at Wimbledon, and who could tell, perhaps be chosen to represent his country in the Davis Cup. A great lump came into Henry Garnet's throat as he saw in fancy his son leap over the net to shake hands with the American champion whom he had just defeated, and walk off the court to the deafening plaudits of the multitude.

As an assiduous frequenter of Wimbledon Henry Garnet had a good many friends in the tennis world, and one evening he found himself at a City dinner sitting next to one of them, a Colonel Brabazon, and in due course began talking to him of Nicky and what chance there might be of his being chosen to play for his university during the following season.

"Why don't you let him go down to Monte Carlo and play in the spring tournament there?" said the Colonel suddenly.

"Oh, I don't think he's good enough for that. He's not nineteen yet, he only went up to Cambridge last October; he wouldn't stand a chance against all those cracks."

"Of course, Austin and von Cramm and so on would knock spots off him, but he might snatch a game or two; and if he got up against some of the smaller fry there's no reason why he shouldn't win two or three matches. He's never been up against any of the first-rate players and it would be wonderful practice for him. He'd learn a lot more than he'll ever learn in the seaside tournaments you enter him for."

"I wouldn't dream of it. I'm not going to let him leave Cambridge in the middle of a term. I've always impressed upon him that tennis is only a game and it mustn't interfere with work."

Colonel Brabazon asked Garnet when the term ended.

"That's all right. He'd only have to cut about three days. Surely that could be arranged. You see, two of the men we were

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depending on have let us down, and we're in a hole. We want to send as good a team as we can. The Germans are sending their best players and so are the Americans."

"Nothing doing, old boy. In the first place Nicky's not good enough, and secondly, I don't fancy the idea of sending a kid like that to Monte Carlo without anyone to look after him. If I could get away myself I might think of it, but that's out of the question."

"I shall be there. I'm going as the non-playing captain of the English team. I'll keep an eye on him."

"You'll be busy, and besides, it's not a responsibility I'd like to ask you to take. He's never been abroad in his life, and to tell you the truth I shouldn't have a moment's peace all the time he was there."

They left it at that and presently Henry Garnet went home. He was so flattered by Colonel Brabazon's suggestion that he could not help telling his wife. "Fancy his thinking Nicky's as good as that. He told me he'd seen him play and his style was fine. He only wants more practice to get into the first flight. We shall see the kid playing in the semi-finals at Wimbledon yet, old girl."

To his surprise Mrs. Garnet was not so much opposed to the notion as he would have expected.

"After all the boy's eighteen. Nicky's never got into mischief yet and there's no reason to suppose he will now."

"There's his work to be considered; don't forget that. I think it would be a very bad precedent to let him cut the end of term."

"But what can three days matter? It seems a shame to rob him of a chance like that. I'm sure he'd jump at it if you asked him."

"Well, I'm not going to. I haven't sent him to Cambridge just to play tennis. I know he's steady, but it's silly to put temptation in his way. He's much too young to go to Monte Carlo by himself."

"You say he won't have a chance against these crack players, but you can't tell."

Henry Garnet sighed a little. On the way home in the car it had struck him that Austin's health was uncertain and that von Cramm had his offdays. Supposing, just for the sake of argument, that Nicky had a bit of luck like that—then there would be no doubt that he would be chosen to play for Cambridge. But of course that was all nonsense.

"Nothing doing, my dear. I've made up my mind and I'm not going to change it."

Mrs. Garnet held her peace. But next day she wrote to Nicky, telling him what had happened, and suggested to him what she

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would do in his place if, wanting to go, he wished to get his father's consent.

A day or two later Henry Garnet received a letter from his son. He was bubbling over with excitement. He had seen his tutor, who was a tennis player himself, and the Provost of his college, who happened to know Colonel Brabazon, and no objection would be made to his leaving before the end of term; they both thought it an opportunity that shouldn't be missed. He didn't see what harm he could come to, and if only, just this once, his father would stretch a point, well, next term he promised faithfully he'd work like blazes. It was a very pretty letter. Mrs. Garnet watched her husband read it at the breakfast table; she was undisturbed by the frown on his face. He threw it over to her.

" I don't know why you thought it necessary to tell Nicky something I told you in confidence. It's too bad of you. Now you've thoroughly unsettled him."

" I'm sorry. I thought it would please him to know that Colonel Brabazon had such a high opinion of him. I don't see why one should only tell people the disagreeable things that are said about them. Of course I made it quite clear that there could be no question of his going."

" You've put me in an odious position. If there's anything I hate it's for the boy to look upon me as a spoilsport and a tyrant."

" Oh, he'll never do that. He may think you rather silly and unreasonable, but I'm sure he'll understand that it's only for his own good that you're being so unkind."

" Christ," said Henry Garnet.

His wife had a great inclination to laugh. She knew the battle was won. Dear, oh dear, how easy it was to get men to do what you wanted.

For appearance sake Henry Garnet held out for forty-eight hours, but then he yielded, and a fortnight later Nicky came to London. He was to start for Monte Carlo next morning, and after dinner, when Mrs. Garnet and her elder daughter had left them, Henry took the opportunity to give his son some good advice.

" I don't feel quite comfortable about letting you go off to a place like Monte Carlo at your age practically by yourself," he finished, " but there it is and I can only hope you'll be sensible. I don't want to play the heavy father, but there are three things especially that I want to warn you against: one is gambling, don't gamble; the second is money, don't lend anyone money; and the third is women, don't have anything to do with women. If you don't do any of those three things you can't come to much harm, so remember them well."

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"All right, Father," Nicky smiled.

"That's my last word to you. I know the world pretty well and believe me, my advice is sound."

"I won't forget it. I promise you."

"That's a good chap. Now let's go up and join the ladies."

Nicky beat neither Austin nor von Cramm in the Monte Carlo tournament, but he did not disgrace himself. He snatched an unexpected victory over a Spanish player and gave one of the Austrians a closer match than anyone had thought possible. In the mixed doubles he got into the semi-finals. His charm conquered everyone and he vastly enjoyed himself. It was generally allowed that he showed promise, and Colonel Brabazon told him that when he was a little older and had had more practice with first-class players he would be a credit to his father. The tournament came to an end and the day following he was to fly back to London.

Anxious to play his best he had lived very carefully, smoking little and drinking nothing, and going to bed early; but on his last evening he thought he would like to see something of the life in Monte Carlo of which he had heard so much. An official dinner was given to the tennis-players and after dinner with the rest of them he went into the Sporting Club. It was the first time he had been there. Monte Carlo was very full and the rooms were crowded.

Nicky had never before seen roulette played except in the pictures; in a maze he stopped at the first table he came to; chips of different sizes were scattered over the green cloth in what looked like a hopeless muddle; the croupier gave the wheel a sharp turn and with a flick threw in the little white ball. After what seemed an endless time the ball stopped and another croupier with a broad, indifferent gesture raked in the chips of those who had lost.

Presently Nicky wandered over to where they were playing trente et quarante, but he couldn't understand what it was all about and he thought it dull. He saw a crowd in another room and sauntered in. A big game of baccara was in progress and he was immediately conscious of the tension. The players were protected from the thronging bystanders by a brass rail; they sat round the table, nine on each side, with the dealer in the middle and the croupier facing him. Big money was changing hands.

The dealer was a member of the Greek Syndicate. Nicky looked at his impassive face. His eyes were watchful, but his expression never changed whether he won or lost. It was a terrifying, strangely impressive sight. It gave Nicky, who had been thriftily brought up, a peculiar thrill to see someone risk a

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thousand pounds on the turn of a card and when he lost make a little joke and laugh. It was all terribly exciting. An acquaintance came up to him.

"Been doing any good?" he asked.

"I haven't been playing."

"Wise of you. Rotten game. Come and have a drink."

"All right."

While they were having it Nicky told his friends that this was the first time he had ever been in the rooms.

"Oh, but you must have one little flutter before you go. It's idiotic to leave Monte without having tried your luck. After all it won't hurt you to lose a hundred francs or so."

"I don't suppose it will, but my father wasn't any too keen on my coming at all and one of the three things he particularly advised me not to do was to gamble."

But when Nicky left his companion he strolled back to one of the tables where they were playing roulette. He stood for a while looking at the losers' money being raked in by the croupier and the money that was won paid out to the winners. It was impossible to deny that it was thrilling.

His friend was right, it did seem silly to leave Monte without putting something on the table just once. It would be an experience, and at his age you had to have all the experience you could get. He reflected that he hadn't promised his father not to gamble, he'd promised him not to forget his advice. It wasn't quite the same, was it? He took a hundred-franc note out of his pocket and rather shyly put it on number eighteen. He chose it because that was his age. With a wildly beating heart he watched the wheel turn; the little white ball whizzed about like a small demon of mischief; the wheel went round more slowly, the little white ball hesitated, it seemed about to stop, it went on again; Nicky could hardly believe his eyes when it fell into number eighteen.

A lot of chips were passed over to him and his hands trembled as he took them. It seemed to amount to a lot of money. He was so confused that he never thought of putting anything on the following round; in fact he had no intention of playing any more, once was enough; and he was surprised when eighteen again came up. There was only one chip on it.

"By George, you've won again," said a man who was standing near to him.

"Me? I hadn't got anything on."

"Yes, you had. Your original stake. They always leave it on unless you ask for it back. Didn't you know?"

Another packet of chips was handed over to him. Nicky's head

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reeled. He counted his gains: seven thousand francs. A queer sense of power seized him; he felt wonderfully clever. This was the easiest way of making money that he had ever heard of. His frank, charming face was wreathed in smiles. His bright eyes met those of a woman standing by his side. She smiled.

"You're in luck," she said.

She spoke English, but with a foreign accent.

"I can hardly believe it. It's the first time I've ever played."

"That explains it. Lend me a thousand francs, will you? I've lost everything I've got. I'll give it you back in half an hour."

"All right."

She took a large red chip from his pile and with a word of thanks disappeared. The man who had spoken to him before grunted.

"You'll never see that again."

Nicky was dashed. His father had particularly advised him not to lend anyone money. What a silly thing to do! And to somebody he'd never seen in his life. But the fact was, he felt at that moment such a love for the human race that it had never occurred to him to refuse. And that big red chip, it was almost impossible to realise that it had any value. Oh well, it didn't matter, he still had six thousand francs, he'd just try his luck once or twice more and if he didn't win he'd go home.

He put a chip on sixteen, which was his elder sister's age, but it didn't come up; then on twelve, which was his younger sister's, and that didn't come up either; he tried various numbers at random, but without success. It was funny, he seemed to have lost his knack. He thought he would try just once more and then stop; he won. He had made up all his losses and had something over. At the end of an hour, after various ups and downs, having experienced such thrills as he had never known in his life, he found himself with so many chips that they would hardly go in his pockets. He decided to go.

He went to the changers' office and he gasped when twenty thousand-franc notes were spread out before him. He had never had so much money in his life. He put it in his pocket and was turning away when the woman to whom he had lent the thousand francs came up to him.

"I've been looking for you everywhere," she said. "I was afraid you'd gone. I was in a fever, I didn't know what you'd think of me. Here's your thousand francs and thank you so much for the loan."

Nicky, blushing scarlet, stared at her with amazement. How he had misjudged her! His father had said, 'Don't gamble;' well, he had, and he'd made twenty thousand francs; and his father

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had said, 'Don't lend anyone money;' well, he had, he'd lent quite a lot to a total stranger, and she'd returned it.

The fact was that he wasn't nearly such a fool as his father thought: he'd had an instinct that he could lend her the money with safety, and you see, his instinct was right. But he was so obviously taken aback that the little lady was forced to laugh.

"What is the matter with you?" she asked.

"To tell you the truth I never expected to see the money back."

"What did you take me for? Did you think I was a—cocotte?"

Nicky reddened to the roots of his wavy hair.

"No, of course not."

"Do I look like one?"

"Not a bit."

She was dressed very quietly, in black, with a string of gold beads round her neck; her simple frock showed off a neat, slight figure; she had a pretty little face and a trim head. She was made up, but not excessively, and Nicky supposed that she was not more than three or four years older than himself. She gave him a friendly smile.

"My husband is in the administration in Morocco, and I've come to Monte Carlo for a few weeks because he thought I wanted a change."

"I was just going," said Nicky because he couldn't think of anything else to say.

"Already!"

"Well, I've got to get up early tomorrow. I'm going back to London by air."

"Of course. The tournament ended today, didn't it? I saw you play, you know, two or three times."

"Did you? I don't know why you should have noticed me."

"You've got a beautiful style. And you looked very sweet in your shorts."

Nicky was not an immodest youth, but it did cross his mind that perhaps she had borrowed that thousand francs in order to scrape acquaintance with him.

"Do you ever go to the Knickerbocker?" she asked.

"No. I never have."

"Oh, but you mustn't leave Monte Carlo without having been there. Why don't you come and dance a little? To tell you the truth, I'm starving with hunger and I should adore some bacon and eggs."

Nicky remembered his father's advice not to have anything to do with women, but this was different; you had only to look at the pretty little thing to know at once that she was perfectly

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respectable. Her husband was in what corresponded, he supposed, to the Civil Service. His father and mother had friends who were Civil Servants and they and their wives sometimes came to dinner.

It was true that the wives were neither so young nor so pretty as this one, but she was just as ladylike as they were. And after winning twenty thousand francs he thought it wouldn't be a bad idea to have a little fun.

"I'd love to go with you," he said. "But you won't mind if I don't stay very long. I've left instructions at my hotel that I'm to be called at seven."

"We'll leave as soon as ever you like."

Nicky found it very pleasant at the Knickerbocker. He ate his bacon and eggs with appetite. They shared a bottle of champagne. They danced, and the little lady told him he danced beautifully.

He knew he danced pretty well, and of course she was easy to dance with. As light as a feather. She laid her cheek against his and when their eyes met there was in hers a smile that made his heart go pit-a-pat. A coloured woman sang in a throaty, sensual voice. The floor was crowded.

"Have you ever been told that you're very good-looking?" she asked.

"I don't think so," he laughed. Gosh, he thought, I believe she's fallen for me.

Nicky was not such a fool as to be unaware that women often liked him, and when she made that remark he pressed her to him a little more closely. She closed her eyes and a faint sigh escaped her lips.

"I suppose it wouldn't be quite nice if I kissed you before all these people," he said.

"What do you think they would take me for?"

It began to grow late and Nicky said that really he thought he ought to be going.

"I shall go too," she said. "Will you drop me at my hotel on your way?"

Nicky paid the bill. He was rather surprised at its amount, but with all that money he had in his pocket he could afford not to care, and they got into a taxi. She snuggled up to him and he kissed her. She seemed to like it.

By Jove, he thought, I wonder if there's anything doing?

It was true that she was a married woman, but her husband was in Morocco, and it certainly did look as if she'd fallen for him. Good and proper.

It was true also that his father had warned him to have nothing to do with women, but, he reflected again, he hadn't actually

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promised he wouldn't, he'd only promised not to forget his advice. Well, he hadn't; he was bearing it in mind that very minute.

But circumstances alter cases. She was a sweet little thing; it seemed silly to miss the chance of an adventure when it was handed to you like that on a tray. When they reached the hotel he paid off the taxi.

"I'll walk home," he said. "The air will do me good after the stuffy atmosphere of that place."

"Come up a moment," she said. "I'd like to show you the photo of my little boy."

"Oh, have you got a little boy?" he exclaimed, a trifle dashed.

"Yes, a sweet little boy."

He walked upstairs after her. He didn't in the least want to see the photograph of her little boy, but he thought it only civil to pretend he did. He was afraid he'd made a fool of himself; it occurred to him that she was taking him up to look at the photograph in order to show him in a nice way that he'd made a mistake. He'd told her he was eighteen.

"I suppose she thinks I'm just a kid."

He began to wish he hadn't spent all that money on champagne at the night club.

But she didn't show him the photograph of her little boy after all. They had no sooner got into her room than she turned to him, flung her arms round his neck, and kissed him full on the lips. He had never in all his life been kissed so passionately.

"Darling," she said.

For a brief moment his father's advice once more crossed Nicky's mind and then he forgot it.

Nicky was a light sleeper and the least sound was apt to wake him. Two or three hours later he awoke and for a moment could not imagine where he was. The room was not quite dark, for the door of the bathroom was ajar, and the light in it had been left on. Suddenly he was conscious that someone was moving about the room. Then he remembered. He saw that it was his little friend, and he was on the point of speaking when something in the way she was behaving stopped him. She was walking very cautiously, as though she were afraid of waking him; she stopped once or twice and looked over at the bed. He wondered what she was after. He soon saw.

She went over to the chair on which he had placed his clothes and once more looked in his direction. She waited for what seemed to him an interminable time. The silence was so intense that Nicky thought he could hear his own heart beating. Then,

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very slowly, very quietly, she took up his coat, slipped her hand into the inside pocket and drew out all those beautiful thousand-franc notes that Nicky had been so proud to win. She put the coat back and placed some other clothes on it so that it should look as though it had not been disturbed, then, with the bundle of notes in her hand, for an appreciable time stood once more stock-still.

Nicky had repressed an instinctive impulse to jump up and grab her, it was partly surprise that had kept him quiet, partly the notion that he was in a strange hotel in a foreign country, and if he made a row he didn't know what might happen. She looked at him. His eyes were partly closed and he was sure that she thought he was asleep. In the silence she could hardly fail to hear his regular breathing. When she had reassured herself that her movements had not disturbed him she stepped, with infinite caution, across the room.

On a small table in the window a cineraria was growing in a pot. Nicky watched her now with his eyes wide open. The plant was evidently placed quite loosely in the pot, for taking it by the stalks she lifted it out; she put the banknotes in the bottom of the pot and replaced the plant.

It was an excellent hiding-place. No one could have guessed that anything was concealed under that richly-flowering plant. She pressed the earth down with her fingers and then, very slowly, taking care not to make the smallest noise, crept across the room, and slipped back into bed.

"Chéri," she said, in a caressing voice.

Nicky breathed steadily, like a man immersed in deep sleep. The little lady turned over on her side and disposed herself to slumber. But though Nicky lay so still his thoughts worked busily. He was extremely indignant at the scene he had just witnessed, and to himself he spoke his thoughts with vigour.

She's nothing but a damned tart. She and her dear little boy and her husband in Morocco. My eye! She's a rotten thief, that's what she is. Took me for a mug. If she thinks she's going to get away with anything like that, she's mistaken.

He had already made up his mind what he was going to do with the money he had so cleverly won. He had long wanted a car of his own, and had thought it rather mean of his father not to have given him one. After all, a feller doesn't always want to drive about in the family bus. Well, he'd just teach the old man a lesson and buy one himself. For twenty thousand francs, two hundred pounds roughly, he could get a very decent second-hand car.

He meant to get the money back, but just then he didn't quite know how. He didn't like the idea of kicking up a row, he was a

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stranger in an hotel he knew nothing of; it might very well be that the beastly woman had friends there; he didn't mind facing anyone in a fair fight but he'd look pretty foolish if someone pulled a gun on him. He reflected besides, very sensibly, that he had no proof the money was his. If it came to a showdown and she swore it was hers, he might very easily find himself hauled off to a police station. He really didn't know what to do.

Presently by her regular breathing he knew that the little lady was asleep. She must have fallen asleep with an easy mind, for she had done her job without a hitch. It infuriated Nicky that she should rest so peacefully while he lay awake worried to death.

Suddenly an idea occurred to him. It was such a good one that it was only by the exercise of all his self-control that he prevented himself from jumping out of bed and carrying it out at once. Two could play at her game. She'd stolen his money; well, he'd steal it back again, and they'd be all square. He made up his mind to wait quite quietly until he was sure that deceitful woman was sound asleep.

He waited for what seemed to him a very long time. She did not stir. Her breathing was as regular as a child's.

"Darling," he said at last.

No answer. No movement. She was dead to the world.

Very slowly, pausing after every movement, very silently, he slipped out of bed. He stood still for a while, looking at her to see whether he had disturbed her. Her breathing was as regular as before. During the time he was waiting he had taken note carefully of the furniture in the room so that in crossing it he should not knock against a chair or a table and make a noise. He took a couple of steps and waited, he took a couple of steps more; he was very light on his feet and made no sound as he walked; he took fully five minutes to get to the window, and, here he waited again. He started, for the bed slightly creaked but it was only because the sleeper turned in her sleep. He forced himself to wait till he had counted one hundred. She was sleeping like a log.

With infinite care he seized the cineraria by the stalks and gently pulled it out of the pot; he put his other hand in, his heart beat nineteen to the dozen as his fingers touched the notes, his hand closed on them and he slowly drew them out. He replaced the plant and in his turn carefully pressed down the earth. While he was doing all this he had kept one eye on the form lying in the bed. It remained still. After another pause he crept softly to the chair on which his clothes were lying. He first put the bundle of notes in his coat pocket and then proceeded to dress.

It took him a good quarter of an hour, because he could afford

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to make no sound. He had been wearing a soft shirt with his dinner jacket, and he congratulated himself on this, because it was easier to put on silently than a stiff one. He had some difficulty in tying his tie without a looking-glass, but he very wisely reflected that it didn't really matter if it wasn't tied very well. His spirits were rising. The whole thing now began to seem rather a lark.

At length he was completely dressed except for his shoes, which he took in his hand; he thought he would put them on when he got into the passage. Now he had to cross the room to get to the door. He reached it so quietly that he could not have disturbed the lightest sleeper. But the door had to be unlocked. He turned the key very slowly; it creaked.

"Who's that?"

The little woman suddenly sat up in bed. Nicky's heart jumped to his mouth. He made a great effort to keep his head.

"It's only me. It's six o'clock and I've got to go. I was trying not to wake you."

"Oh, I forgot."

She sank back on to the pillow.

"Now that you're awake I'll put on my shoes."

He sat down on the edge of the bed and did this.

"Don't make a noise when you go out. The hotel people don't like it. Oh, I'm so sleepy."

"You go right off to sleep again."

"Kiss me before you go." He bent down and kissed her. "You're a sweet boy and a wonderful lover. Bon voyage."

Nicky did not feel quite safe till he got out of the hotel. The dawn had broken. The sky was unclouded, and in the harbour the yachts and the fishing-boats lay motionless on the still water. On the quay fishermen were getting ready to start on their day's work. The streets were deserted.

Nicky took a long breath of the sweet morning air. He felt alert and well. He also felt as pleased as Punch. With a swinging stride, his shoulders well thrown back, he walked up the hill and along the gardens in front of the Casino—the flowers in that clear light had a dewy brilliance that was delicious—till he came to his hotel. Here the day had already begun. In the hall, porters with mufflers round their necks and berets on their heads were busy sweeping.

Nicky went up to his room and had a hot bath. He lay in it and thought with satisfaction that he was not such a mug as some people might think. After his bath he did his exercises, dressed, packed, and went down to breakfast. He had a grand appetite. No continental breakfast for him! He had grapefruit,

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porridge, bacon and eggs, rolls fresh from the oven, so crisp and delicious they melted in your mouth, marmalade, and three cups of coffee. Though feeling perfectly well before, he felt better after that. He lit the pipe he had recently learnt to smoke, paid his bill, and stepped into the car that was waiting to take him to the aerodrome on the other side of Cannes.

The road as far as Nice ran over the hills and below him was the blue sea and the coastline. He couldn't help thinking it damned pretty. They passed through Nice, so gay and friendly in the early morning, and presently they came to a long stretch of straight road that ran by the sea. Nicky had paid his bill, not with the money he had won the night before but with the money his father had given him; he had changed a thousand francs to pay for supper at the Knickerbocker, but that deceitful little woman had returned him the thousand francs he had lent her, so that he still had twenty thousand-franc notes in his pocket. He thought he would like to have a look at them. He had so nearly lost them that they had a double value for him.

He took them out of his hip-pocket into which for safety's sake he had stuffed them when he put on the suit he was travelling in, and counted them one by one.

Something very strange had happened to them. Instead of there being twenty notes as there should have been there were twenty-six. He couldn't understand it at all. He counted them twice more. There was no doubt about it; somehow or other he had twenty-six thousand francs instead of the twenty he should have had.

He couldn't make it out. He asked himself if it was possible that he had won more at the Sporting Club than he had realised. But no, that was out of the question; he distinctly remembered the man at the desk laying the notes out in four rows of five, and he had counted them himself.

Suddenly the explanation occurred to him; when he had put his hand into the flowerpot, after taking out the cineraria, he had grabbed everything he felt there. The flowerpot was the little hussy's moneybox and he had taken out not only his own money, but her savings as well. Nicky leant back in the car and burst into a roar of laughter. It was the funniest thing he had ever heard in his life.

And when he thought of her going to the flowerpot some time later in the morning when she awoke, expecting to find the money she had so cleverly got away with, and finding, not only that it wasn't there, but that her own had gone too, he laughed more than ever. And so far as he was concerned there was nothing to do about it; he neither knew her name nor the name of the hotel

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to which she had taken him. He couldn't return her money even if he wanted to.

" It serves her damned well right," he said.

This then was the story that Henry Garnet told his friends over the bridge-table, for the night before, after dinner when his wife and daughter had left them to their port, Nicky had narrated it in full.

" And you know what infuriated me is that he's so damned pleased with himself. Talk of a cat swallowing a canary. And d'you know what he said to me when he'd finished? He looked at me with those innocent eyes of his and said, ' You know, Father, I can't help thinking there was something wrong about the advice you gave me. You said, " Don't gamble; " well, I did, and I made a packet. You said, " Don't lend money; " well, I did, and I got it back. And you said, " Don't have anything to do with women; " well, I did, and I made six thousand francs on the deal.' "

It didn't make it any better for Henry Garnet that his three companions burst out laughing.

" It's all very well for you fellows to laugh, but you know, I'm in a damned awkward position. The boy looked up to me, he respected me, he took whatever I said as gospel truth, and now, I saw it in his eyes, he just looks upon me as a drivelling old fool. It's no good my saying one swallow doesn't make a summer; he doesn't see that it was just a fluke, he thinks the whole thing was due to his own cleverness. It may ruin him."

" You do look a bit of a damned fool, old man," said one of the others. " There's no denying that, is there? "

" I know I do, and I don't like it. It's so dashed unfair. Fate has no right to play one tricks like that. After all, you must admit that my advice was good."

" Very good."

" And the wretched boy ought to have burnt his fingers. Well, he hasn't. You're all men of the world, you tell me how I'm to deal with the situation now."

But they none of them could.

" Well, Henry, if I were you I wouldn't worry," said the lawyer. " My belief is that your boy's born lucky, and in the long run that's better than to be born clever or rich."

JUST IN CASE?

I want to go on living out of a suitcase for the rest of my life. I'd love it if I had a fifty-foot by thirty-foot suitcase.

SHIRLEY MACLAINE

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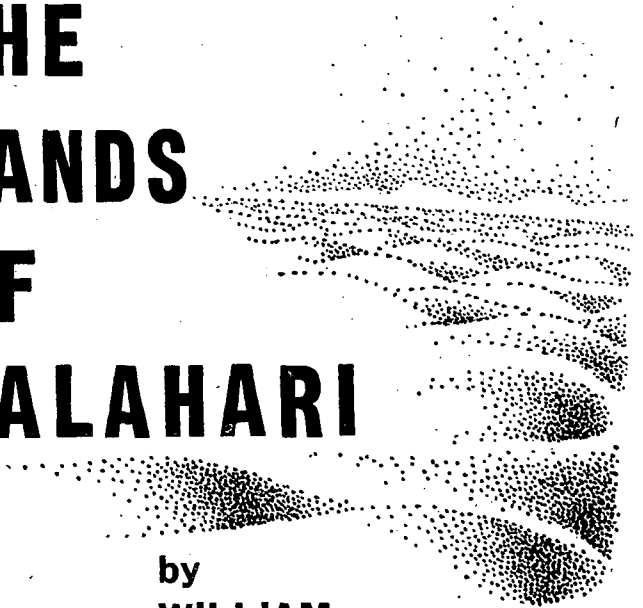
THE SANDS OF KALAHARI



by
WILLIAM
MULVIHILL

Fly over South-West Africa and you will see desert: a third of a million square miles of sand. From the Angolan border south to the Orange River no water runs regularly into the sea: the beach stretches a hundred miles inland and there is almost no rain: the Namib Desert.

In the interior great escarpments rise and there are nameless bleak mountains and great empty savannas, desolate and dry. Then another desert, the Kalahari, the Great Thirstland, larger than the British Isles. Southward is five hundred square miles of parched bushveld.

In all this vastness there are towns, ranches, mines and settlements but they are far apart, like atolls dotting a vast ocean.

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William Mulvihill, author of Argosy's dramatic new serial, has written two novels, The Man Trackers, and Fire Mission. His stark, searingly vivid portrayal of the desert proves him an expert on Africa and the Kalahari, and he in fact owns one of the largest private libraries on the subject.

DURING the night Detjens died and the rest of them were almost glad. The crash had broken his back and fractured his skull and he had died without once gaining consciousness. Now there were six of them, five men and a woman, standing round the blanket-wrapped body in the early morning heat.

When the plane crashed the day before, Detjens was the only one hurt. He was unknown to the rest of them as they were to each other, but his slow dying had drawn them together around him. Now they felt that they had known each other for a long long time. They had nursed him, prayed for him, sat with him through the long black night. Because of him they had stayed near the wrecked plane, not moving; because of him they had not tried to reach the low black mountain off on the horizon. He was dead now and they were free and they stood round the body, waiting. They were nervous, strained, aware of each other's impatience.

Sturdevant, the pilot, cleared his throat.

"I think we should bury him here," he said, without looking up. "Right by the plane. No sense in going off anywhere else."

They agreed. If Detjens was buried where he lay it meant that Sturdevant was planning to move, to reach the hills, the black mountain far away. And he was their leader. They studied him for an instant: a tall rangy man in his late thirties with a sharp, tough face. He was a redhead, an ex-fighter pilot, a South African. A few days ago they hadn't known him; now their lives depended upon his judgment.

He looked up and past them, studying the awesome desert, slowly rubbing the red stubble that covered his lean jaw. He adjusted his peaked cap and slapped at a fly that settled on his bare leg. He wore a brown sports shirt, khaki shorts, and rubber-soled shoes. They waited for him to speak but he turned and walked away studying the pieces of debris that lay around the smashed plane. He picked up a curved piece of aluminium and came back to them, knelt in the sand and began to dig.

The semicircle broke up. The woman turned away, walked wearily to the tilted fuselage, and went through the low door. The men found cans and pieces of metal and joined Sturdevant.

As the grave grew deeper the pilot studied the other four men. His responsibility . . .

Grimmelmann was the eldest, old enough to be the father of all of them, a white-haired German who walked with a slight limp and carried a heavy rubber-tipped cane. He was in his seventies but still strong. When they got on the plane back in

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Mossemedes he had been wearing a heavy belt-in-the-back European suit and a stiff white collar. Instead of a suitcase he had carried a cheap bulging briefcase which Sturdevant always associated with Germans and refugees and displaced persons. The old man was heading for Windhoek, seeking a brother who owned a vast sheep ranch. He spoke English in a slow, precise manner like an old schoolmaster. Digging in the sand now he was in his shirtsleeves, and from the depths of the briefcase he had found an old peaked hat of military cut which almost covered his wispy white hair.

Jefferson Smith was the youngest, probably in his late twenties. He was an American, a Negro, a professor and a scholar doing some kind of research on Africa. Tall and graceful with an easy smile. When Sturdevant had first seen him he was carrying two heavy suitcases and his light seersucker suit was damp with sweat. He was alert and talkative, his voice deep and pleasant. Sturdevant wasn't used to him yet; the other Negroes who had been in his plane were mine boys, labourers. It was difficult to realise that Smith was an American with a lot of money and a lot of education.

Next to the Negro, scooping dirt out of the hole with a tin can, was Mike Bain, another American, in his late thirties. A good guy, Sturdevant mused, but one he'd have to watch. He was flabby and soft and there was a nonchalance in his movements and remarks. Grimmelmann was old but he was strong and high-spirited; Bain was neither. He was shorter than Smith, under six feet, and goodlooking in a haggard way: a face that had seen a lot of good times and a lot of bad times. Sturdevant knew he was an American engineer who'd been knocking around in West Africa for some years.

The last man was O'Brien, big, handsome, capable. He stabbed into the earth with a sharp piece of metal, loosening it for the others and then scooping it out himself with a flat piece of plywood. He was hatless and the heavy stubble of his beard merged with his raven-black hair. He, too, was American, close to Sturdevant's age, and he had come to Africa to hunt. Along with a big leather suitcase he had carried two expensive hunting-rifles and a pair of binoculars. He was taller than the pilot and heavier through the chest and shoulders. When they had met back in Angola the big man had been wearing a bush jacket and a wide-brimmed hat. When they shook hands Sturdevant had sensed a latent strength, a power surpassing his own. He was glad O'Brien was with them.

The grave grew deeper. At last they broke through the gravel-filled hardpan and the earth became softer.

Sturdevant brushed away a trickle of sweat from his upper lip. Very soon now, unless they found water, they too would be shrivelled and dead. There was water in the plane, almost two tins of it, but when that was gone . . .

There wasn't going to be any search plane.

He told them a few hours after the crash. It had been a private flight, unrecorded. He had agreed to take them to Swakopmund

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and they had left Angola without ceremony, a lone plane winging south over the dry, barren land. There would be no search plane, for no one knew that they were lost. They had to save themselves and they had already wasted one precious day.

People died in deserts. It was a strange way to die in the twentieth century but it happened. The world was still filled with great blank spaces where men died for uncomplicated reasons: thirst, hunger, heat, cold.

Not long ago he'd read in a newspaper about a party of geologists who had come upon an awesome sight in the Libyan desert. A World War II American bomber sitting on its belly in the drifting sand. It had sat there undisturbed for over fifteen years; the log books and clothing and guns were untouched. There was no sign of the crew but investigators believed that they had left the plane seeking water and died in the endless desert, four hundred miles from the sea.

" It's deep enough," Sturdevant said. All at once they stopped digging.

They stood up and arched their backs to take out the stiffness. Sturdevant and O'Brien picked up the corpse and placed it in the shallow grave. They all knelt down again and began to push the soil back into the hole.

Grace Monckton sat inside the plane in a deep bucket seat, eyes closed, half asleep. She had been up most of the night with the dying man and she was dizzy now with shock and fatigue.

Her face was aristocratic; even in half-sleep there was alertness in it, an indefinable assurance. She was a young and beautiful woman with heavy golden hair. She groaned and murmured; as terror came into her dream, she shivered; she was young and she did not want to die. She reached out and pulled a faded raincoat about her, for the night chill was still with her. When she got on the plane she'd been wearing madras shorts and a light blouse. During the night one of the men had given her a great bulky sweater. Now, wrapped in the raincoat, she fell into a fitful sleep.

The men left the mound of earth and walked to the battered stump of the plane, to the shade, to hide from the rising sun.

Sturdevant was last. Like the others he ducked through the low doorway and lowered himself into one of the tilted seats. He closed his eyes. He was a fool. He had killed little Detjens and wrecked his own plane and made a final mess of his life. And he had the lives of five others in his hands, lives for which he was responsible. If only the plane would shiver and roar and roll forward, take off and fly away, get them out . . .

" I think," said Grace Monckton, " that we should try to do something now. I think some of us or all of us should try to look for help."

Sturdevant nodded, his eyes still closed. It was cooler here than outside and he was grateful.

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"We will," he said. "When the sun goes down we'll all head for that mountain."

"Will we find water?" she asked.

Sturdevant's hands rose and fell in a limp gesture of ignorance. "Who can say?"

"We don't have any choice," O'Brien said. "We can't stick with the plane any longer."

The others listened and agreed and remained silent, sitting in the same seats they had occupied during the flight. Grimmelmann began to snore quietly.

"Let's all try to get as much rest as we can," the pilot said. "We'll be walking all night."

Mike Bain smoked his last cigarette. He recoiled from the thought of moving. The walk to the black mountain would be tough, maybe too tough for him. It might be better if he stayed. When the plane crashed he'd been thrown around like the rest of them and he'd cut his thumb. Now it was beginning to throb and bother him; he'd have to look after it when he felt better; there must be something left in Sturdevant's medical kit. He should do it now but the seat was too comfortable and he was too tired.

The cigarette burnt his fingers. He had saved it for hours and thought about it and finally smoked it, sucking the pleasure from it, knowing there were no others. The reality of it frightened him. For years and years he had smoked two packets a day.

He flicked the tiny butt out of the shattered window and watched it die in the sand. He closed his eyes, slept . . .

There was still some food in the plane, and the water that Sturdevant always carried. Africa is a dry land and the plane was his home and he kept it well supplied. One of the tins of water had burst open when they crashed and they had drunk another; now there were two left, almost ten gallons.

Sturdevant's bellylanding had been something of a miracle. They had glided over the table-flat desert for an eternity, noiseless, the ground closer each instant. The wheels touched at last and were ripped off—then the screech of tearing metal as the tail went, the left wing. They swerved and spun round, almost turned over. Then silence. They had survived.

Jefferson Smith had made a HELP sign. He picked up pieces of the smashed plane and started on the first letter. The other men joined him until they ran out of manageable debris and then, exhausted and dizzy, they sought the shade and darkness inside the battered fuselage, gratified that they had worked for the common salvation.

And they did other things. O'Brien set fire to one of the wheels, which had been snapped off and was three hundred yards from the fuselage. He poured oil on the rubber and touched a match to it and they watched the black column of smoke rise higher and higher into the still air; they added debris to the pyre, but in the end it died down and no one came to save them. Just before

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dawn they burnt the other tyre, hoping the glow might attract someone.

O'Brien took one of his rifles and fired three shots in quick succession but there was no one to hear and he stopped.

They were utterly alone in a great sand sea.

When they left, the sun sat on the flat line of the horizon. Several plans had been proposed and rejected. O'Brien had wanted two groups; one of the younger and stronger to go first as a scouting party. The others would follow at a slower pace, carrying most of the water and the other things they would need. Some of them had thought this a good plan but Sturdevant vetoed it. He didn't want the group to break up.

It wasn't easy to leave. They stood round the smashed plane adjusting the nondescript packs and bundles they would take, making petty decisions, discarding one thing for another. They would warn each other of the danger of carrying too much and a moment later would point to the value of some other object and hope that it would not be left behind.

O'Brien knew clever ways to make tight serviceable packs with a blanket and a few pieces of twine and he helped them all.

Grimmelmann walked among them urging them to be sure to take all the shoes they had; in the desert shoes were almost as important as water.

O'Brien's rifles and ammunition were distributed among the men and Sturdevant decided to carry the two water tins himself. He always carried plenty of water in the plane and now it was keeping six people alive. In three or four days it would be gone.

The old man was the first to leave. He stood for some time watching the others, impatiently leaning on his heavy alpenstock. Then he turned and walked off into the desert, looking towards the far mountains. There was a faint chance that there might be something on the far side of them—a mining settlement, a railway line. There might be a spring; they might run into some Bushmen or Berg Damaras or even some good German sheep ranchers. It was all a matter of luck.

And the others followed him, one by one. Grace Monckton came striding forward, confident, optimistic. Then O'Brien, strong and purposeful, a huge pack on his back, a rifle in each hand. Then Jefferson Smith hurrying to catch up.

Sturdevant stood, hands on hips, surveying the remains of his aeroplane. They were all gone now, all except Mike Bain, who was still inside, rummaging among the things the rest of them had abandoned. It had been a good plane and now it was gone, like so many he had flown during the war. It was gone and Detjens was dead and not a soul in the world knew where they were. It was difficult to walk away from the plane, for now it was the only familiar thing; it was a machine and it was broken and round it stretched the prehistoric desert.

He picked up the two water cans and walked away.

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Mike Bain saw Sturdevant leave. He was alone. He cursed and gave up the search. He'd been looking for cigarettes. There might have been a stray packet in one of the suitcases or in some forgotten pocket. But there wasn't. He ducked through the doorway and stepped outside. He looked at the wrench in his hand and dropped it on the sand, a big open-end wrench he'd found in the end of the plane. It was over two feet long but it was well balanced and he'd used it to pry among the discarded things.

He turned and walked after Sturdevant, hurrying, trying to fix the pack that kept slipping from his back. He was suddenly afraid. He turned and ran back to the plane, picked up the wrench, and then hurried after the others. . .

The sun went down but the heat did not go; it was in the sand and in the air and in their memory. They walked across the barren land, closer together now, talking little, their shoes grinding in the sand, crunching in the gravel. Darkness came and they were suddenly cold. Far ahead was the mountain and from time to time they would look up and study it and wonder how far away it was and when they would reach it.

It was not a night of blackness; the moon was clear and the clouds were light. They walked on steadily, stopping occasionally to rest and draw together and sip water. They were tired but they did not speak of it. They could not halt and sleep, for the sun would return and trap them on the sand and they might never reach the mountain. And whatever the mountain held for them, even if it was only shade to die in, they must reach it.

Suddenly dawn came. They looked and saw the mountain very far off: Grace Monckton's stamina gave way and she wept openly from fatigue and despair. They had tried so hard, walked so long, yet it was as if they had not moved from the smashed plane. The others saw her and looked away and said nothing.

I'd cry too, Mike Bain thought; if I were a woman, I'd cry.

They hurried on, faster now, for the memory of the sun came and they grew afraid. They stumbled more often, sometimes falling but always rising again and going on; and little by little the group fell apart, the unity of the night was lost; soon it was no longer a group but a mile-long line of solitary figures stumbling towards the black mountain.

When dawn came the baboons moved down from their cave and sat blinking in the light; they scratched and grimaced and yawned. Only the young were frisky.

It had been another quiet night for the clan. Back in the cave they had clustered close together in a giant ball, clutching each other in sleep to ward off fancied danger and the chill of the night. They had squirmed and pushed sleepily in the darkness; some on the outside of the group grew cold and fought others to get close to the centre and the warmth; others dreamt of snakes and leopards and grew excited until they were cuffed awake.

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Now night was gone. The sentinels scrambled to the high and distant posts and scanned the world that lay over the jagged slabs of rock, the sudden drops, the gravelly slopes, and sudden ledges. The rest of the troop waited in the sun, happy for its warmth. The sentinels motioned to the leader. All was safe.

The leader moved forward, down the escarpment. He was old and his hairy brown body was covered with spots of white; he was old but he was bigger than all but two of the warriors, and stronger than even these. He led the troop down from the point of an upward jutting rock to a smooth slab below, then along a narrow ledge to a perpendicular drop of ten feet. On down the mountainside: leaping, dropping, all without great effort. The troop followed and they were noisy now, chattering, complaining, anticipating.

At last they came to where food was to be found and the group broke up. Some of them began turning over stones to look for grubs and caterpillars and centipedes. Others went to clumps of acacia trees to look for sweet gum. Some wandered looking for berries or herbs or sweet roots. Soon the troop was spread out over a wide area but they were not separated. Sentinels watched on all sides: an enemy might be near.

Gradually they moved along the valley floor, staying close to the cliffs, for the grass might shelter an enemy waiting to snatch one of the young. Once, a millennium ago, they had lived in trees but now the rocky cliffs were their home.

The sun grew hot. They had eaten well. The old leader wandered under the cliffs and then went up twenty feet. The sentinels moved around him, ahead of him, above him. The troop followed slowly. They went to where there was breeze and shadow, where they could relax and sleep, where the young could play.

But one of the young sentinels high above gave a cry and they froze with terror. It was a strange cry; they had never heard one like it. They scrambled up, saw what the sentinel saw. Far away in the hot sand where they had never gone, something moved. A group of tiny figures came towards them.

The troop sat tensely, uneasily, watching. One of the figures fell and they all jabbered in wonder and speculation. The warriors bristled and boasted of their strength. The females worried, held their young close, cuffed them when they made too much noise. The old leader sat silently, frowning. He was angry. The others backed away from him, for when he was angry he was short-tempered and dangerous.

Far away in the desert below the tiny figures came closer.

The mountain was before them; there was nothing else. They walked towards it and the fears of the dawn were gone. They would reach it now. It was no more than ten miles away.

It's like a gigantic ship, O'Brien thought. A sinking ship, bow high, stern going down first. Or it was a mastless battered hulk cast upon a shore, half sunk in the bubbling surf. Or a black iceberg, an iceberg in a sea of sand. But there must be game

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on it; there had to be. There was life on some icebergs. And if there was life there had to be water, enough for them to exist on.

As they approached it, they began to draw closer together but there was no talking. They were all lost in their own thoughts and talking dried out the mouth and made the thirst greater. They came at last to a mile-long slope which led to a high escarpment of shale and rock and sand.

Some of the rocks were great sharp chunks which had broken off ages ago from the cliffs above. O'Brien reached one of them and slumped down in the shade. Jefferson Smith came and then Grace Monckton. Then Sturdevant with the two tins of water. Then the old man and Mike Bain helping one another. They sat down in the shade and stretched out in the sand. Sturdevant measured out a little of the water in a plastic flask top. They drank and curled up in the sand and fell into exhausted sleep.

Three hours passed before Sturdevant stood up, brushing the sand from his shorts. He kicked O'Brien and the big man rolled over and sat up, alert and ready.

" I'm going up," Sturdevant said.

" I'm ready any time," O'Brien said.

" I think it's better if you stay here," Sturdevant demurred. " I'm going up to have a look, see what's on the other side. I'll take one of your rifles. If I fire once, you bring the rest of them up. If there's nothing, I'll be back; and when the sun goes down we can keep moving along the cliffs. I'll see if Bain wants to go with me. I want you here in case some of them need help getting up."

O'Brien nodded, ran his hand over the thick black stubble on his jaw. He was the strongest, stronger than Sturdevant and smarter too, but they listened to the pilot because he had been in charge of the plane and because he was an African.

The rest of them worried him. Jefferson Smith was soft with easy living, a city man. Grimmelmann was in his seventies; it was a miracle that he was still alive, that he had made it across the desert. And Mike Bain was worse than any of them, slowly dying without his booze and tobacco; a big hulk of a washed-out man who had stayed too long in the tropics. And the woman was on the verge of hysteria. All of them would need help from now on. He might have to push them up the mountainside.

Sturdevant bent down and shook Mike Bain, talked quietly to him until Bain got up and staggered out of the shade, trying to shield his sleep-stunned face from the sun. He followed Sturdevant and they started up, picking their way through the gargantuan boulders, walking carefully on the loose shale. The heat burnt through their shirts and through the soles of their shoes, but there could be no turning back. Both of them knew that and pushed the thought from their minds. They had to go on. It was like the crash and the walk across the desert; for them there was only one direction: forward. They had to climb in the sunlight because there would be no visibility in the cool night; they

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had to climb up the hot shale, reach the mountaintop. From the top they might see something: a town, a ranch.

The boulders grew smaller, flatter, not as high as the ones below. The footing became surer as the loose shale gave way to rock. They leaned forward now, picking up each foot with a studied and conscious tempo, trying to maintain an even pace. And gradually Sturdevant realised that Mike Bain wasn't going to make it. It had been foolish to take him along; there had been no need for it except his own desire not to be alone.

They reached the end of the slope. The escarpment rose above them, a gigantic black wall shimmering in the sun.

Sturdevant rested in the shade and finally Mike Bain joined him. They sat and looked at each other and said nothing. After a long time they were breathing normally.

Sturdevant staggered to his feet. "You wait here. I'm going up now." He waved to the break in the steep wall.

Mike Bain nodded, and Sturdevant moved away and after a time vanished in the break. It grew cool in the shade of the overhanging ledge. Bain cleared away the larger stones and stretched out, rested. He should have gone on with Sturdevant; maybe the pilot needed him this very moment. But it was the same old story: he'd flopped again. The drink and all the years had broken him.

He wasn't really Mike Bain any more. The old punch was gone, the old snap. And he didn't give a damn. He failed and people looked at him as if it didn't matter, just as Sturdevant had looked at him when he didn't get up. He didn't deliver any more and people shrugged and walked away. It had been like that for years now but it still hurt. He was a guy stuffed full of pride but his willpower was gone.

He fell asleep.

Later, the sound of a shot came to him as it came to the others below: far away, casual in the loneliness, echoing over and over and over. He didn't move. He was comfortable. Sturdevant had found something. They'd be saved now; they'd have food and water and cigarettes. It had been a bad dream; now it was over. The others would be coming up and he'd wait for them, help the old man, the woman . . .

Two hours later they all joined Sturdevant. They stood on a wide ledge of ink-black stone and saw what the pilot had first seen. Opposite them, perhaps many miles away, was another steep, jagged ridge of equal elevation. It ran parallel with theirs until both ridges met miles away in a severe peak. Together the ridges formed a V-shaped cul-de-sac, a deep valley. There was grass, sun-browned, dry. Trees. And far away, close to the cliff, there was a patch of green.

They began the descent.

All at once Grimmelmann became the leader. Sturdevant had led them across the sand desert and up the escarpment and they

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had followed and admired his intelligence and stamina; now his authority diminished as the old man's wisdom emerged.

When they had crawled down the cliff and huddled in the shade, breathless and dizzy, he walked off several hundred yards and returned with five melonlike objects. The others sat wordless: O'Brien with the rifles across his knees, Jefferson Smith sipping from the tin cup.

They sat and watched him take out an old penknife, cut into one of the melons and drink from it. He cut it open and began to eat the wet pulp inside. He smiled at them.

"Tsamma melon," he said. He cut the one he had into four slices and handed them to Grace Monckton. "Pass them round," he told her. "This is the sweet kind. The other's bitter but you can eat it too. If there are enough of these we can last for a long time; men, and horses too, have survived weeks and weeks on them. It's the mainstay of everything here; even Bushmen need them."

He stabbed another one from the pile in front of him and tossed it to Sturdevant. Bain came and picked up one and soon they were all busily drinking the juice and eating the sweet pulp.

"They show you something about adaptation and survival," said the old German. "When it matures, the rind gets tough as you can see, the older the tougher, protecting the water inside, the water and the seeds—eat them, too, they're good—and then when the growing season's about to start and the rain comes, it rots and lets the seeds go. Perfect timing."

"They're good," O'Brien said. "But how many are there around here?"

"I saw a big patch out farther," Grimmelmann said, waving his hand out into the valley. "We'll just have to see. If we decide to stay here for a while, we should pick them all and store them out of the sun."

They all nodded.

"Where did you learn all this?" Sturdevant said. "You sound like an old Boer, like my grandfather, full of all the stories of the old days."

"I was in South-West Africa long ago," said the old man. "The Herero War, all of it desert fighting. We learnt much then about living. I think we're in Süd-West now. You think the Kalahari. It does not matter. It is all the same. A line on the map."

"That was a terrible war," Smith said. "I've read a little about it."

"Ja," Grimmelmann said. "A terrible war as all wars are. I will tell you. I am ashamed to say I was in it. The Herero were good people, but the settlers wanted their land and cattle and their labour. They would not submit. Most of them were exterminated. Sixty thousand. It was much like your Indian wars in America."

He got to his feet slowly, helping himself with his heavy cane.

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All the melons were gone, their rinds scattered in the stony sand. Grimmelmann began walking up the valley. O'Brien got up and walked after him and one by one the others followed.

O'Brien caught up with the old man.

"You mentioned rain," he said.

Grimmelmann nodded, stopped for a moment, and using his cane turned over a flat stone the size of a dinner plate. Two mottled lizards fled from the light.

"Yes, the rain. It does rain, of course, in this part of Africa. More than you would think. More in some places than the official figures say. But there is a catch, my friend. It rains but the rain hits the sand and within a few minutes it vanishes. There is nothing to hold the water. It comes down in torrents and it runs through the sand. If you dig down far enough in the right spots you will hit water. Pits they call them here. But there is no surface water. If you had surface water in most of the Kalahari the land could support great herds of cattle, but there is none. Here and there a shallow pond after a good rain, pans they are called, but they dry up and grass grows in their place.

"And the country is getting drier all the time, do you know that? A lake that the famous Dr. Livingstone discovered, one that you will see on old maps, it is gone now. Gone. It dried up and now you can drive a truck across it and raise dust. The curse of Africa is aridity, my friend, not jungle."

"Is this the dry season here?" O'Brien asked.

"Yes," said the old man. "It is the dry season. Don't wait for it to rain or you will wait for a long time. But there must be at least one spring or source of water near here. Coming down the cliff I saw traces of baboon."

"Let's hope so," the big man said.

"The last great rain was in 1934," the old man said. "I was in Germany then but I read about it in the papers. It caused the Swakop to run to the ocean and it brought so much rubble with it that the coastline moved out to sea. It took the railway bridge along with it."

They came to a cave, passed by it, and found a pool at the base of the towering cliff. It had a diameter of six feet and was five feet deep. There was no outlet but the water was not stagnant or brackish. There were small trees round it and tracks of animals and birds.

"I think we will all live now," Grimmelmann said. "With water we have a chance. For a while."

They knelt down and drank with their cupped hands. O'Brien dipped his deep cowboy's hat into it, backed away and let it run over his head and down his face. He began laughing. Grace splashed it into her eyes and on her neck. Bain lay still and pressed his face into it.

Grimmelmann borrowed the tin cup from Sturdevant and began pouring water on top of his head.

Smith poured it all over himself with cupped hands, and

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Sturdevant submerged his head completely under the surface. Sturdevant took off his shirt and filled up one of the water tins and then raised it over him letting the water shower over his dust-blackened body. He began singing *Waltzing Matilda.*

They went back a quarter of a mile to the cave they'd passed on the way up the valley. It was ideal: high and broad with a white sandy floor. They stood in the entrance, which Sturdevant thought large enough to back a truck into.

O'Brien took a flashlight out of his pack, and they followed him into the semi-darkness.

" Over here," Grimmelmann said. He pointed with his cane to strange designs on the flat wall near him. " Bushman painting."

" They're beautiful," said Grace Monckton. The others nodded as their eyes followed the beam of light. The rock paintings had movement and life. Bands of tiny men with bows and arrows chasing nimble gazelles; an imprint of a small hand; a scene of people dancing and another that looked like a battle scene: large men with spears fighting tiny bowmen.

O'Brien turned away and walked on. The others followed, their minds still filled with the primitive drawings. Other people had lived here long ago; perhaps they could survive too. The cave narrowed and the sandy floor tilted upwards, became rock and then ended abruptly. O'Brien raised the beam of the torch and they followed it with their eyes. The ceiling veered up, spirelike, jagged, boring into the mountain.

" A kloof," Sturdevant said. " A chimney. Way back in geologic time, water came down this hole and ate through the softer rock and made the cave."

" For the Bushmen," Grace said.

" Or maybe people before the Bushmen," Smith said. " Maybe people lived here tens of thousands of years ago before any of them. I bet if we dug deep enough in the sand here we'd come across old campfires and bones and neolithic tools and flints."

" Maybe Bushmen still come here," Grace said.

They turned in the darkness as if an intruder had spoken. For an instant they were uncomfortable, vulnerable.

" Is it possible? " O'Brien asked.

" Where's Bain? " somebody said. The flashlight moved from face to face. No Bain. All the faces were suddenly taut.

" Bain? " The shout echoed in the kloof above them.

" Let's go back," Grimmelmann said. " Perhaps he is near the mouth." They walked quickly through the fine white sand and passed the wall paintings.

Bain was lying in the sand, resting, trying to sleep. They stood round him. " I thought I'd wait here," he told them. " Anything wrong? "

" We figured you were with us," O'Brien said.

" I turned back after the pictures on the wall," Bain said. " I've got a fever, I think. From the cut on my hand. I'm beginning to feel lousy."

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" I'll get a blanket," Smith said. " If we're going to stay here we can untie the stuff we're lugging." He looked round. " Are we going to stay here? "

" Yes," Grimmelmann said. " This is perfect. We are very lucky. If this were higher it would be a place for baboons, or leopards if there are any. We should stay here." And without waiting to hear from the others he went outside.

The others broke up. Smith brought his belongings in and got out the blanket for Bain. Grace and O'Brien left to look for melons. Grimmelmann began collecting sticks and piling them inside the cave, close to the mouth. Sturdevant walked back towards the pool with the rifle O'Brien had given him. There were bird tracks round the water.

It grew cold with the coming of dark and some of them put on extra clothes. Grimmelmann made a fire against the wall close to the rock painting where the wall curved inwards and the heat was reflected. One by one they came close to it, watched the flames dance and blacken the wall, listened to the pops and cracks of the wood.

They had eaten melons that O'Brien and Grace Monckton had found. Sturdevant had fired at a large bird but it had flown away uninjured. He described the bird and Grimmelmann thought it was a bustard; he did not tell them it tasted like turkey.

But they were not hungry, for their stomachs were filled with tsamma melon and good water. They were alive and they had a cave and fire. Grace looked up from the fire to the Bushman paintings. Smith followed her gaze, knew that Grimmelmann had built the fire so as not to destroy the primitive art but to be close to it, see it. The flames danced and the tiny figures seemed to come to life, to run and jump and dance and fight.

" Will they come back? " Grace asked.

Smith turned and saw that she had spoken to him. He was surprised. Despite everything they had gone through, the blonde girl was still reserved, almost haughty.

" Come back? " he said. " Who can say? These paintings are probably a hundred years old. But there are still some wild Bushmen about, according to what I've read." He turned to the old man for confirmation.

" Ja," Grimmelmann said, nodding his head. " A few hundred perhaps if you speak of the pure wild Bushmen. There are others, mixed breeds, half wild and half Western. They are neither one thing nor the other."

" There were Bushmen in Rhodesia," Grace said. " My grandfather used to speak of them."

" I have known Bushmen," Grimmelmann said. " In South-West Africa. Fifty years ago, when it was a German colony. Standlopers. They were the ones who lived along the coastline. Beach runners. Then others inland. Tiny men. Under five feet. Fantastic when you think of it. Stone Age people in a world that is reaching out into space with rockets."

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" How the hell do they survive? " Bain asked.

" The same way all people do," Smith said. " They understand their environment and adjust to it."

" You make it sound easy," Bain protested. He had wrapped himself in a blanket and joined the others at the fire. An hour before he had been violently cold.

Smith laughed. " O.K., so I sound like a professor now and then, but it really is the answer. Grimmelmann will agree with me."

" He's right," the German said. " They live in the Kalahari and in South-West Africa now. They are still neolithic. Hunters. Like the Australian blacks and the true Eskimos and the Congo Pygmies. Still hunting after all the ages of agriculture and towns and cities and empires and world wars."

" But why *here*? " Bain said. " Why do it the hard way? "

" They were chased here," Smith said. " The books say that they were forced out here by stronger people. It's the old story. A powerful people invade a place and the original people are either killed, enslaved, or driven into the local swamp, mountain, desert, or what have you. No choice. The invader takes the good soil and the easy life."

Sturdevant tossed a small stick and they watched the fire take it. " Maybe the Bantu killed off most of them," he said. " They were supposed to have come out of central Africa, maybe Nigeria or thereabouts, and come south. This was about the same time van Riebeeck and the Dutch started coming into the Cape. We killed or made slaves of them too, so they were caught between two fires. The Boers and Bantu. More and more they were forced into the Karoo and the Kalahari and the other bad places.

" I'm of Boer descent and I'm not ashamed of it but we did some terrible things to the Bushmen and Hottentots. Hunting dogs, poison, all of it. They were hunted like vermin. I think the reason for it was that they couldn't comprehend tame cattle or sheep. They'd kill stock, couldn't grasp the idea of private property, ownership of dumb animals who wouldn't run from them."

The others looked at the tough redheaded pilot and realised that he was an educated man, a tolerant person. Since they had known him he had been curt, ordered them about, spoken sharply to them. But he was relaxed now and they all felt better, safer.

" And even in the desert we pursued them," Grimmelmann said.

" There might be some Bushmen here," Bain suggested. " Maybe we could make contact with them, get them to take us out."

" I've seen no signs of them," Grimmelmann said.

" What signs would they leave? "

" Bones at least," the German said, sweeping his hand round to take in the cave. " Signs of fires. Something. Perhaps I am wrong but I have a feeling about this cave. I think the last men were here hundreds of years ago."

" They could be watching us now," O'Brien said, staring into the fire.

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The others turned, not to him, but to the mouth of the cave and saw the total primeval blackness of the night. Grace Monckton shivered.

"We came to the cave out of an old instinct," O'Brien went on. "If Bushmen were chased here, they might not have brought the cave instinct with them. They slept in different spots each night in the open."

"They are like that," Grimmelmann said. "A good point." He kept nodding to himself as O'Brien went on.

"They could have passed this cave last week. Drunk from the pool. Killed an animal, eaten it, and moved on. Why would they set up housekeeping in this godforsaken spot if they can move around the desert without fear of dying of thirst? We are thinking of them in our terms; of how we would act."

"Maybe our painter is a contemporary then," said Smith. They looked at the rock painting and the shadows leaping over it. It was a thing of great beauty.

"How the hell do they live in the desert?" Mike Bain asked.

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" How do they stay here? "

" They are the world's best hunters," Grimmelmann said. " They are almost animals themselves in their manner of hunting. They have bows and tiny arrows and make great use of their secret poisons. They crawl close to springbok, shoot one, and then track it, for hours, days even; once they are tracking an animal they cannot lose it.

" The Australian black is like that too. All Stone Age hunters have to be, for life is so hard for them. Their weapons are very rudimentary and slight against any kind of game. A good wound is about all they can inflict; that's the importance of poison. When there is no game they eat melons such as you and I have just eaten and other things: roots, tubers of various kinds, berries, certain resins and bulbs, lizards and snakes and insects and honey, ant eggs, eggs of all birds, especially the ostrich, yams, seeds, grubs, anything and everything that can be digested . . . And do not make faces, my friends. These things may soon be in our diet. I for one hope so. Tomorrow we must see what else the valley holds."

" Tomorrow will be our last day here," Sturdevant said. " I'm going up that peak to look round. We'll fill the water cans and head for the next likely-looking spot. We can't sit still."

" You might see something and you might not," Grimmelmann said.

" We've got to look," O'Brien said.

" Of course," the old man said. " But do not build your hopes too high. The Kalahari is a world in itself. The Great Thirst, that's what they call it."

" Why did we have to crash here? " Bain asked. He spoke quietly as if to himself, a childish question from a feverish brain, but its simplicity made them all start. It had been in their minds too but they had not voiced it.

O'Brien snorted. " The gods are angry, I guess." He winked at Grace Monckton, startling her. She blushed and turned away.

" I wonder," Sturdevant said. " I wonder."

The others turned to him. He had been toying with a stick and now he tossed it into the fire. Sparks flew upwards into the blackness.

Grace sat watching Mike Bain who hunched forward, eyes closed, wrapped in his blanket. He looked very ill but there was not much they could do for him. It was quiet now except for the wind outside in the black night.

O'Brien got up and began to make a bed for himself inside the circle of warmth created by the fire. One by one the others followed. Smith helped Mike Bain, brought water to him, made him comfortable for the night.

The fire died down. The cave grew colder. They slept.

Finally the sun rose and brought warmth. They waited for it in the darkness, watched it rise, saw its redness tint the grey-

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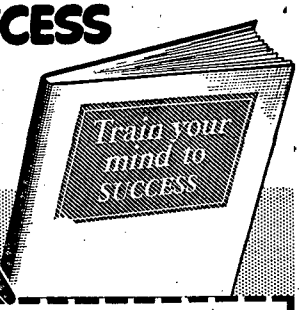

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blue horizon. They understood now a little of the sun rites of prehistory, the sun gods, the sacrifices. Without the sun the world would be a sterile frozen ember, aimless in black space.

The sun rose and brought light and heat; the night creatures shunned it and found deep crannies in the rock. The sound of the insects came; birds stirred; the baboons came from their den on all fours, lazy and sullen, half awake. The east wind came: night air seeking the warm sea.

Then the long day with the sun supreme, merciless in triumph, beating down upon the sand and rock, on the withered trees, the desert plants. Rock sometimes crumbled and stones split when one side became hotter than the other or when there was a sudden change in temperature. The sun ruled. All life adjusted to it or perished.

Over the eons, the sun and the wind and occasional rain. The soft rock became pitted from the wind-borne sand; it crumbled, fell, turned into sand and helped batter the chalk cliffs, carve gorges, scour the tougher crystalline rock that stood defiant and alone in growing sand belts. Through long geologic periods the land rose, formed high plateaux, sharp mountain chains. Long rains came, and the cascading water wore knifelike ravines in the earth and stone as it raced to the sea. One element fought the other and in the end it made a land that was hard and pitiless and unrelenting.

When light came they found it difficult to leave the cave. It was still cold and they were exhausted. The excitement of the first day had worn off; the terrible fatigue had caught up with them. They knew they would have to climb the peak before they could move on, but for another day they would rest and drink water and eat the wonderful melons.

O'Brien and Sturdevant got up and walked off across the canyon. They came to a place where many of the thorn trees had died and the pilot crouched down and started a fire with a few handfuls of dried grass and bark.

They built up the fire, adding to it everything and anything that would burn or smoulder or make smoke. The roots of many of the dead trees were weak and rotten and the two men pushed them over, dragged them into the fire.

A great pillar of smoke rose from the canyon reaching for the clouds; the air was almost still; the smoke column grew thicker, mushroom-shaped. The two men continued to carry broken limbs and decayed tree trunks. They were black with soot and filth, their clothes torn, their eyes watery from the intense heat. In time they became too exhausted to work and they found tree shade and rested, watched the smoke, speculated on how far it could be seen.

They rested for an hour and walked back to the cool cave.

There were lizards in the canyon. Later in the day Grimmelmann killed one with his walking-stick, cut off the head, tail, and feet, cleaned it, roasted it, and ate it. The others watched him,

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scowling, disgusted. They could not bring themselves to eat a lizard for breakfast or for dinner; yet each of them knew that it was inevitable. They would do it if they had to close their eyes and stuff it down their unwilling throats. The tsamma melons were tasty and filling, but six people could not live for long on the available supply. Unless they moved on or found other food, they too would eat lizard.

"It is not the first time," Grimmelmann said, looking up at them. "With me it is not difficult. The first time, yes. But you get used to the taste. This one is like chicken." He licked his fingers and rubbed them in the sand.

"Let's climb the peak," O'Brien said.

"Not today," Sturdevant told him. "I'm still groggy. And so are you. We need the rest. Eat the melons and drink plenty of water and sleep. Maybe tomorrow . . ."

"I did not eat the lizard to disgust you," the old German said. "You will have to adjust to this place. To adjust is to survive."

"We'll get out of here," Sturdevant said. "From the top of the peak we'll be able to see a hundred miles."

"But we can't walk a hundred miles," Grace said. "I don't think I could reach the plane again."

"But I could," Sturdevant said. "Walking at night with water I could make a hundred miles. More."

"But it might not be enough," Grimmelmann said.

Another night.

They gathered round the fire. "When will it rain?" Smith asked Sturdevant.

The pilot thought for a while. "Six weeks, five weeks. A long time for us. It rains in February and March and then the rest of the year is dry as hell. Two months maybe of greenness and that's in the good parts of the country, not here. When the rain stops, everything starts drying out again and it's the best part of a year before any more rain falls. The sheep and cattle get along on the dry stuff or they starve to death."

"Sometimes there are great grass fires," Grimmelmann said. "And when the grass is gone nothing comes back to replace it until the rains come again. It's terrible for the animals."

"I can't get used to the cold nights," Smith said suddenly. "I keep forgetting we're three thousand feet or so above sea level."

"I wish now we hadn't burnt up all that wood," O'Brien said. "We should have had sense enough to go farther away from the cave." Sturdevant nodded. The American was right.

"Are we going to stay here?" Grace asked.

"I don't know," Sturdevant said. "We'll have to see how far this mountain runs. I've got to get up that peak to have a look and see what I can see. We were lucky to find this place, the water. It was one chance in a million."

They knew this. They had survived the crash and by some miracle had stumbled upon a fountain in the desert.

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But it was not enough. They had to move, go on. The cave was but a temporary refuge. When Sturdevant found out which way to go they would fill the water cans and leave.

It grew colder. They wrapped themselves in their blankets and clothes and fell asleep . . .

In the morning, the sound of birds.

They brought the dead ashes to life and heaped wood on the fire, shivered over it for half an hour eating tsamma melons and drinking water warmed over the fire.

" Let's climb the peak," O'Brien said.

Sturdevant spat a melon rind into his cupped hand. " I was thinking the same thing. We'll take turns carrying one of the water tins. It'll be hot up there. I can tell you that."

" With the binoculars we should be able to see right into Windhoek," O'Brien said.

" Don't say funny things," Sturdevant said. " I have a feeling we flew to the moon."

They moved out of the cave into the weak sunshine.

They looked at the far peak. Sturdevant stretched, yawned. " O.K.," he said. " Let's start getting ready."

The others were relieved; they had been thinking about it for two days now, wondering what they would see from the top of the jagged peak.

Mike Bain sat in the warm sunlight and silently pleaded to go

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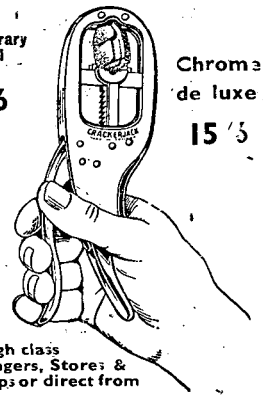

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with them. He had never wanted anything so much in his life and he wondered if he was losing his mind. But he wouldn't go. He was too weak, too ill. In a few minutes he would get up and go back to the cave and rest. Somebody would bring him water; then he would drift off to sleep and dream terrible dreams. He was dying; his whole body was a glowing pain, his throat, his mouth, his stomach. He needed cigarettes, cigarettes and some real food. Bread. Meat that was not from disgusting creatures that crawled in the sand. If the pain did not go away he would take one of the rifles and kill himself.

He got up and went inside to his bed. As he did so the blonde girl came to him, knelt down beside him.

"Are you better now?" she asked.

"No, it's the shock of going off liquor and cigarettes, that and the hunger, the exertion, the cut thumb, and the sun. That's a hell of a lot for a guy like me. I've been out of shape since the war."

"You were a soldier?"

"I was in the American navy. But not on ships. An outfit called Seabees. We built airfields, camps, harbours."

"You liked the war?"

"I liked building," Mike said. "We did fantastic stuff with bulldozers and cranes and rock crushers. You have no idea . . . no idea . . ."

"You liked it," Grace said. He was talking; it was a good sign.

"Yes, I liked it. We built roads through swamps and jungles and paved them with crushed coral. I wonder about those roads sometimes, and the bridges and buildings. I wonder if they are being used or if the jungle has taken over again, the rot, the time. I like to think that people are taking care of them, using them."

"What were you doing in Nigeria and all those other places?" Grace asked. "The same?"

"The same," Mike said. "Whatever needed building. I'm a knockabout, roughneck type of engineer. I've got a knack for improvising and getting by with half of what you need for a job. You learn that in out of the way places and in wars. They send you the wrong material and half of that is stolen for the black market. They send you the wrong men and you end up doing most of the work yourself and training the guys under you. It's a tough life if you're honest and you like working."

She got up and brought water to him and he drank and felt better. She left him and he dozed off dreaming about her . . .

While he slept the others left: Sturdevant, O'Brien, Jefferson Smith, and Grace Monckton.

Grimmelmann walked slowly down the canyon. He looked everywhere for honey-bees, for signs of game, for indications that people had been in the valley. They were in the Namib Desert. Sturdevant kept saying they were in the Kalahari but he was wrong; they were in South-West Africa. But it mattered little;

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it was all the same, sand and sun and desolation. But it smelt like South-West Africa . . .

It was getting so that he thought of nothing else but his first months in Africa, those bad times he wanted to forget. The Herero War and the chase over the desert.

All his life he'd been trying to forget it, drive it down into the bottom of his mind, and now it was with him again. Fate had returned him to this place. The land had been waiting for him.

Grimmelmann bent down and studied a mark in the sand. Baboon, probably. The cliffs were full of them. He straightened up and walked on, swinging his heavy cane. He had to clear his mind of the past and concentrate on the present. It was getting so that all he thought about were the old days, half a century ago when he was a very young man.

The heat shimmers along the dead rock; nothing moves.

Sturdevant led the way. O'Brien and Grace Monckton walked together and Jefferson Smith was last. The peak dominated their thoughts but they did not talk about it; it was too important. Their lives depended upon what they would see from the highest point.

"What do you do in Rhodesia, Mrs. Monckton?" O'Brien asked the girl.

"Cattle," she said. "Cattle and sheep."

"And you came down from Nigeria?"

"Yes," the girl said. "We flew up last month to visit an uncle. My father hadn't seen him since the war. He had to get back but I stayed on for another two weeks and then started out on my own."

"And your father didn't know you had started home?"

"No, we just left. Flew to Leopoldville. Missed the plane to Livingstone. Took the Impala plane with the rest of you. If we'd all waited for the scheduled plane we'd have been all right."

O'Brien was silent. He'd missed the flight too and gone on the Impala plane. It was a small South African airline with good pilots and good planes but they'd been forced down in Angola with engine trouble. They'd spent the night in an ancient Portuguese hotel and in the morning Sturdevant was there, eating breakfast with them and offering to fly them to Windhoek. He was an ex-fighter pilot with a shiny new plane and he was obviously getting rich flying chartered runs and hauling equipment and mine boys. So they got in his plane and flew away, south and eastward. Night came and then a sudden storm. By dawn they were lost, flying low over endless sand and rock, running out of fuel.

He turned to the girl again.

"Did your husband stay back in Nigeria, Mrs. Monckton?"

She hesitated for an instant. "I'm divorced."

O'Brien nodded.

"I came back to Africa last year," she said. "From England. After my divorce. I've been staying with my father."

"I see," O'Brien said. He wondered what sort of a man her husband had been, what she had been like as a wife.

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"Do you think that Impala pilot will put two and two together?" she said. "He knew we left on Sturdevant's plane."

"Yes," O'Brien said, "but he doesn't know that we got lost and crashed. A guy like Sturdevant is always on the move. He leaves one place, flies off into the blue, and that's it. Nobody waits for him. His flights aren't logged. The Impala pilot figures we got to Windhoek and went our separate ways and he figures that Sturdevant is now chartered out to some mine in the Katanga maybe or working for the South African government if he's got the right connections. Nobody knows we're down."

"Have you decided where we are?" Grace asked.

"Sturdevant says we're in the Kalahari."

Jefferson Smith caught up with them. "It reminds me of Nevada," he said. "Or California, the desert part. The stark bare mountains and the shale and sand and scraggly bush. It's like the Southwest." His voice was pleasant, deep and unhurried.

"I'm from California," O'Brien said. "You hit it right. It is like the Southwest. You get the idea back in the States that Africa is all jungle and maybe some veld. You're amazed when you find out that a hell of a lot of it is just like Arizona or West Texas."

Grace Monckton turned to Smith. "You're a professor, aren't you? I thought somebody said that back in Angola."

Smith nodded. "I'm an assistant professor, really, working on a doctorate, I got a grant to come here for a year. I'm trying to unify what we know about Africa before the European penetrations, especially Negro Africa."

"Where do you teach?" O'Brien asked.

"Harvard."

O'Brien whistled. "You make me feel like a barbarian. I managed to get through college by playing football and having an uncle on the board. And I came over to hunt. Sounds simple as hell now, doesn't it?"

"Yes," Grace said. "You could have stayed in America and hunted."

"And you, Mrs. Monckton, could have stayed in England and raised cattle," O'Brien said.

She smiled. Why didn't he call her Grace?

"And as for me," Smith said. "I should have had sense enough to stay put after all my ancestors went through to survive the slave ships and all the rest of it."

They all began laughing for the first time. Far ahead Sturdevant stopped, turned, and waited for them to catch up.

They climbed the peak carefully stage by stage, resting each time, for the sun was on them. It was not a difficult climb nor dangerous but it was long and only O'Brien had ever climbed a mountain peak before.

They reached the top and stood on a flat windswept ridge that veered up another fifty feet to a final pinnacle. Below them was the canyon; far away, almost at the end of it, was the pool. Next

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to it was another canyon and then a third; and to their left, on the other side of the ridge, another spur of rock running off enclosed still another narrow gorge. Sturdevant guessed that the two farthest ridges were ten miles apart.

And there was nothing else. They stood on the top of a great black stone island in a sea of sand.

"I thought this would be the end of a mountain range," Smith said, voicing all their thoughts.

"We still have all the water we want," Grace said. "That's all I was hoping for, the water."

O'Brien took his binoculars from Sturdevant and studied the gorges below them. "It's like a big hand," he said. "Five ridges running and enclosing four canyons. Let's hope a plane comes soon." He handed the glasses to Smith and, sitting down, took off his boots.

They sat down with O'Brien. His feet were bare and he was wiggling his toes. They looked about them again and wondered how the top of a peak that looked so sharp could be so flat. It was a platform, acre-sized, of black rock. And it was hot from the sun.

"What'll we do?" Grace asked. She was not frightened as she had been when the plane crashed. They had survived. They had found things to eat. They were intelligent. Sturdevant had been born and raised in the bush; he was smart and tough. And so were O'Brien and Smith and the old man.

"If there was anything to burn we could start a fire up here and keep it going full time, plenty of smoke and all. Maybe somebody would see it." Smith was thinking out loud. But they had all thought of it. There was nothing to burn.

"We'll just have to stick it out," O'Brien said. He began putting his socks back on carefully; now they were free from sand. He tapped one of the scuffed boots on the rock. "We can stay here. We've got water. Somebody is sure to spot the plane and investigate. It's just a matter of time."

"You're wrong," Sturdevant said. "You have no idea of the Kalahari. It's endless. That plane might rust away before anybody flew over it; and it wouldn't be a search flight so they might not even see it. I'm a pilot. I know. If we sit here and wait we'll never make it. There are too many of us for the food supply, for one thing. There is an end to sand hens and lizards and melons."

"What about the baboons?" O'Brien asked.

Sturdevant made a face. "I never heard of anybody eating baboon." The thought disgusted him more than the thought of eating rock python and yellow lizards.

"There's always a first time," O'Brien said.

"But there's a limit to them too," Smith said.

"I'm going to get help," Sturdevant said. "I'm going to take the two water tins, make a good pack out of them, and walk out of here."

"No," Grace said. "Don't go. Let's all stay together."

"I think she's right," Smith said.

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"Suicidal," O'Brien said. "You said so yourself. This place is endless. Bigger than most countries in Europe. What chance would you have?"

"A good chance, I think," Sturdevant told him. "Those two cans hold quite a lot of water if only one is drinking. I'd walk at night and get out of the sun in the day. I'm in good condition. I know a little about deserts. And I'm responsible. I'm going."

"The compass was broken," Grace said. "It's nobody's fault. I say we should stick together. You said that yourself at the plane."

"I'd go in a straight line," Sturdevant said. "Eventually I'd have to hit something, a railway line, a ranch, a road, something." It wasn't really true and he knew it. It was possible to walk hundreds of miles and see nothing but scrub and sand. But there was nothing else to do. They'd all die unless they made contact with the outside world.

"I'm against it," O'Brien said. "We've survived this long. We can hold out. Maybe natives come here. The Bushmen old Grimmelmann was talking about."

"I don't think so," Sturdevant said. "There are no signs. If there were any real wild ones around they wouldn't come near us anyway. Or if they did it might be dangerous for us. I've heard stories of them taking hunters out into the desert and then abandoning them."

"I could go with you," Jefferson Smith ventured.

"No," Sturdevant said.

O'Brien stood up. "Shall we start back?"

He held his hand down for Grace Monckton and helped her up. She felt the power in his arm and stood close to him for an instant, aware of his maleness.

Sturdevant and Smith groaned and got up and they began to make their way down the cliff. They did little talking on the way down. Instead one and all thought about what they had seen from the peak. They had stood at the point where the two sharp ridges came together, an arrowhead of black rock rising out of the sand. And between the rock walls the valley with a strange abundance of living things, the Biblical garden in the wilderness, narrow under the peak and then growing wider until the cliffs that enclosed it fell away and the sand started again.

When they reached the cave it was already late in the afternoon. They stumbled into the darkness and drank from the pool and slumped to the white sand.

Grimmelmann sat by Mike Bain, who was asleep, wrapped in a blanket.

"Our friend Bain has a fever now," said the old man. "I think from the cut hand."

"I can look at it later," Sturdevant said. "Maybe we can do something for him. We've got to watch infections and cuts."

"There's nothing but sand," Grace Monckton said. "Everywhere there's sand . . ."

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Grimmelmann nodded in the gloom.

"We didn't see anything," Jefferson Smith said. He too was beginning to doze off; the sand was so soft and it was cool here, unlike anywhere else in the canyon.

"I think we are farther west than you think," Grimmelmann told Sturdevant. "In the Namib."

"It's possible," Sturdevant said. "I told the others, so I'll tell you. I'm going to walk out of here, tomorrow maybe or the next day. I'll take the two water tins and I'll go out and tell them that we crashed. I'll be back in a nice big plane . . ."

"You'll die in the sand out there," Grimmelmann said.

"Maybe," Sturdevant said.

"The desert is a terrible thing," the old man said.

"I think I might go with you." O'Brien stretched out in the sand now, hands behind his head, eyes closed.

"I didn't invite you," the pilot said.

"It's a free country," O'Brien told him.

"Listen," Sturdevant said. "I'm going alone, carry my own water and set my own pace."

"I could go in another direction," O'Brien suggested.

"You haven't any water tins, anything to carry water in," the pilot said. "With those two tins I can make it. All a matter of endurance. If you want to help, let me have one of the rifles. And that big hat of yours with the wide brim. Once you beat the need for water it's all distance."

Grimmelmann cleared his throat and in the semi-darkness they turned to him. "Listen to me," he said. "Stay here. Do not try anything so foolhardy. The desert will kill you. The sun will get into your head and boil your brains. You will get tired and you will lie down and pray to die. You are a pilot, you are used to speed. The desert is no place for men; our bodies are not made for it; we are too small and weak for it, too slow."

"He's right," Smith said. "It would probably be impossible to do it with anything short of another plane. Remember when we were coming down? All that space . . ."

Outside the sun had gone and the canyon was suddenly dark. The noise of insects grew louder and a baboon sentinel barked from somewhere on a sheer slope. The troop moved higher, out of danger. It became cooler.

Mike Bain stirred in the sand and opened his eyes. The rock overhead seemed far away in the gloom; the daylight gli ted dully on it. He closed his eyes. He was dying.

And he didn't care. When he died all the pains in his body would stop; the crawling, scratching rawness of his throat, the stomach nausea, the constant headache, and above all the terrible hunger for tobacco and liquor. Death would be a welcome end.

Someone was bending over him; someone sat in the sand beside him. "Feel better?" It was Sturdevant.

"I'm dying," Bain said. "Dying happily. It's going great."

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"Don't talk like that or you will," the pilot said.

"We haven't got a chance, any of us."

"I have," Sturdevant said.

"I hope you make it," Bain said.

"Where were you heading?" Sturdevant asked.

"Me?" Bain said. "I was going to Lusaka. Looking for a job. I know some guys from the old days who are with the big copper outfits there. Was going to hit them for a job."

"What do you do?" Sturdevant asked.

"I'm an engineer. I've knocked around. Bridges, dams, mining, construction. Anything."

"Well, get rid of that fever. We can use you."

"Don't be silly, Sturdevant. We've had it."

"Where were you working before we got together on the plane?"

"Nigeria. We were messing about with a railway in the back country. I got sick of the place after a year so I said good-bye and headed south."

"What's wrong with the U.S.A.?"

"I went back there after the war," Bain said. "I got a nice job with a big construction company. I bought a dozen white shirts and cut down on the booze and started to reform. It was tough but I was winning for a while there. Then trouble. I was fired. I went to Pakistan on a government deal, and I haven't been back to the States since.

"I'm the original Point Four boy; I'm half-civilised, that's why I go over big in the underdeveloped areas as they call them now. What the hell, the money was always good and if you made a mistake who the hell knew or cared? I mean we worked like bastards when we had to and when we played it was hard, too. I was sort of a bum in one way, or maybe I just felt like that being out of the country so goddamn long, kicking around, drinking too much . . ."

"You want a melon?" Sturdevant said.

"Maybe later," Bain said. "How about some water?"

Sturdevant got up and came back with a canteen cup.

Bain emptied it all in one gasping drink, spilling it on his face, his chest, not caring. He pretended for an instant that it was good liquor.

"Thanks," he told the pilot. He was weary again.

He felt Sturdevant putting one of the blankets over him as he slid off into sleep.

In the night Grace woke. She lay still for a time and the sounds came again and she knew it was Bain.

Nobody moved. She got up slowly and stood over the almost-dead fire. She added a few pieces of wood to the glowing ashes, shivered in the cold night air. She went to Bain and knelt down next to him. His teeth chattered; he groaned from the cold that follows a fever.

She held his face, spoke quietly to him. Other dark forms turned and moved in the darkness, O'Brien perhaps or Smith.

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There wasn't anything more they could do for him. They brought him food and water; Sturdevant had given up his sleeping-bag. And during the night they were all cold, waiting for the dawn and the sun.

She wanted to cry. There was no medicine, nothing.

Bain's teeth chattered. He was trying to double up in the bag, make himself smaller, conserve his warmth. But it would do no good; the cold was everywhere; there was not enough wood to keep a big fire going all night. He would have to suffer.

She began to shiver. A tear ran down her cheek and she brushed it away.

She found the zipper of the sleeping-bag and pulled it down. Mike recoiled from the rush of cold air, came fully awake. She worked herself into the bag, wiggling, pushing, sliding her body deep into it, feeling Bain enclose her, seeking her warmth and softness. She turned and pulled the zipper up, sealing off the cold world.

When dawn came, Bain was against her, warm but without fever. He had survived the night-cold, the despair.

She worked free from him and the sleeping-bag and returned to her own bed.

Hours later, when Bain woke, he lay and watched the girl move about the cave. She brought him a canteen cup of heated water and a piece of melon.

"You had a fever last night," she told him. "But you're cooler now. You're getting better."

Bain looked up at her, studied the soft mouth, the warm neck, the heavy blonde hair. It had been a feverish dream, all of it.

After he had eaten melons with the others, Sturdevant took his map case and walked away until he found a place where he could be alone, where he could work, think. And he found such a place a quarter of a mile down the canyon. In the shade of the towering cliff was a thick, smooth slab of rock that reminded him of a table. He put the leather briefcase on the rock, opened it, and then carefully unfolded a large map, placing small stones on the edges to keep it flat.

He stood looking at the map for a long time, scratching himself, shifting his weight from one foot to the other, rubbing his bearded chin.

They were here on the map, somewhere, somewhere . . .

The lettering on the big map was of various sizes and types. The largest and most ornate was reserved for SOUTH-WEST AFRICA, BECHUANALAND PROTECTORATE and CAPE PROVINCE. Then came DAMARALAND and GREAT NAMA LAND and BRITISH BECHUANALAND, followed by the smaller letters for Windhoek, Keetmanshoop, Luderitz, Gobabis. And there were various colours on the map indicating altitude above sea level. Dark green for the lowest, then light green, tan, orange, and brown for the high places over five thousand feet. It was a vast region, filled with great empty spaces.

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There was the railway running up to Windhoek and there were some first-class highways and many roads but they were like a broken cobweb spanning a wide window.

He found a pencil and turned away from the map. He began calculating, estimating. There was the fuel load and the distance from Mossamedes in Angola; there was load and wind and the features of the land he had seen before the crash. He took a ruler and began placing it on the map, from one point to another. He began to whistle, to hum. He had to work out their general whereabouts, to narrow it down.

They were certainly south of Windhoek, say at least a hundred miles. And figure a hundred miles from the sea at a minimum. He put the ruler on the map and drew a line that started a hundred miles from the sea and ran east for five hundred miles; it cut the railway a hundred miles south of Windhoek almost on 24 degrees latitude. The line crossed into the Kalahari Desert at a tiny spot named Lehututu. He made this line the top of a rectangle, five hundred miles long, two hundred miles wide. They were somewhere inside it.

Both sides lay in pure sand desert, the Kalahari and the Namib on the west. Most of it was at an elevation of three thousand feet; but there were vast areas much higher. There were rivers but they were without water except during the brief wet periods after a violent rain. The Nosop, the Elephant, the Oup.

A hundred thousand square miles . . .

Two-thirds of it was east of the north-south railway line. But there was no way of cutting down the area—nothing on the map or in the landscape that hinted whether they were east or west of it, nothing that indicated that the black mountain was in one part or another. It could be anywhere, in the Namib or in the bleak stretches of the Kalahari, in some sand pocket along the fringes of the jagged mountains between the railway and the distant sea.

He folded the map and put it away with the papers. He would walk westwards. There was nothing north and east except more of the Kalahari. He'd go west and maybe hit the railway or a recognisable watercourse, a road.

He walked back to the cave.

Sturdevant left the next day, two or three hours before the sun set. He would travel by moonlight, in the night, whenever the sun did not dominate the world. But for the first leg of the trip he would give himself a head start.

He wore the big wide-brimmed hat that O'Brien had discarded and he carried the other rifle. He looked strong and able, almost casual—tall and lean, red-bearded. He wore a pair of army-surplus shoes, twill trousers, and a tattered shirt. On his belt was a small hunting-knife he'd kept in the plane to open beer cans.

But the pack was the most noticeable, most unusual feature. He had taken the two light water tins and fastened them to a makeshift packboard. They set it high on his shoulders after much

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adjustment, filled with water now, heavy. The packboard was an ingenious affair of light pieces of wood, an old belt, a short length of copper wire, bits of cord and string from the things they had carried from the plane. It was covered now with his light windcheater. He would need the jacket, Grimmelmann warned, and it would keep down the water evaporation. The old German shook hands with him now and patted him on the back.

"Walk at night," he said. "Look for vleys first of all. Build fires from high spots. . . . Do you have some of the matches?"

"Yes," Sturdevant said. "And I'll make it. I've got enough water here for a long time."

"Good luck now, Dutchman," O'Brien said. They shook hands.

"I'll have the rifle cleaned before I give it back," the pilot said.

"And the hat too," O'Brien told him.

"What can I say?" Jefferson Smith told him. "What can any of us say except thanks . . . as long as we can't keep you here. You're a brave man."

And Grace came. "Take this," she said. It was a bundle made from a piece of her clothing, bulky and mysterious. It contained many melons, more than they could really spare.

Sturdevant looked at all of them for the last time, up at the black cliffs, at the far peak.

"I'll be seeing you," he said, and he turned and walked off down the canyon towards the sand and the far horizon.

In a little while he was no longer visible.

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★ ***The second part of The Sands of Kalahari by William Mulvihill appears next month.***

SOLUTIONS to FRUIT SALAD on page 38

1. *It comes from the French nappe pliée, folded sheet.*
2. *a. A type of orange. b. Rowan berry.*
3. *a. Currant. b. It originated in Tangier.*
4. *Snails in Berks or Wilts, oysters in U.S.A., something hard to swallow anywhere!*
5. *The Papaya, whose juice is used commercially in meat tenderisers.*
6. *a. Quatre Mendiants is a dessert of dried figs, raisins, filberts, and almonds, and is named after the four main orders of mendicant friars. b. Granadilla. c. Crab Apple—it originally came from Siberia.*
7. *Orange, cherry, plum.*
8. *a. Sir Walter Raleigh. b. The Trojan war.*
9. *I'd inform on you for £100,000.*

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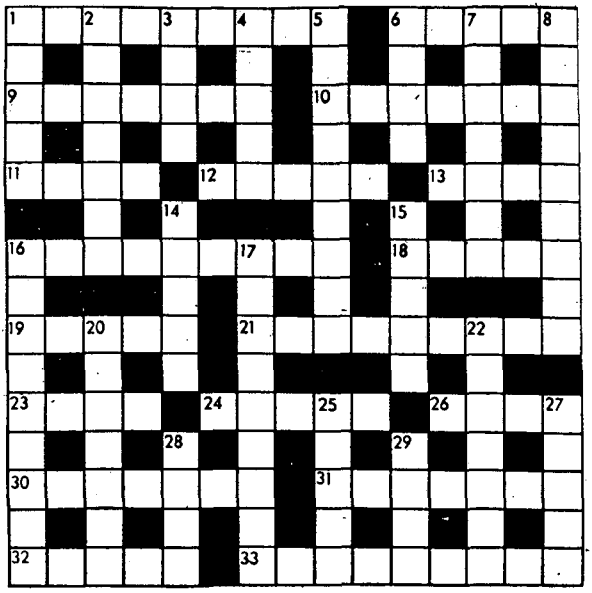
ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

★

Solution on page 23

★



CLUES

Across

1 Present in a tree for Christmas (9).

6 Always hanging around pubs (5).

9 Does it arrest the Christmas spirit ? (7).

10 Short credit in Union—fabulous (7).

11 Elusive snowman, yet I find him here (4).

12 Like rushes-O (5).

13 Looks as if we carry the can (4).

16 Scenic show from Mary and Moira (9).

18 Christmas bird—in party hat ? (5).

19 Pearl's mum from north area (5).

21 Agents give talc as sty (9).

23 Former morning ? No, test (4).

24 Bring on with a dog inside (5).

26 " Heigh-ho ! the holly! This —— is most jolly" (Shakespeare) (4).

30 Headless P.M. and I end mixed serial (7).

31 Scrubbed fast ? (7).

32 Go crabwise south, lazy ! (5).

33 Is music written on it ? (9).

Down

1 Wan from eating festive pie ? (5).

2 Rose rot, cock (7).

3 With enough, you can really swing, man (4).

4 He created praying hands (5).

5 Boisterous Texan rube (9).

6 —— ho ! (4).

7 Gets no stocking (7).

8 What vocalists do at these get-togethers (4-5).

14 Piercing talkers? (5).

15 Oar sounds like bonehead (5).

16 Specimen I eat at Christmas (9).

17 Noises can mix going up (9).

20 Cleaned, maybe, but burnt (7).

22 " Betwixt the —— and the ground " (Camden) (7).

25 Disturbed when set-up's reversed (5).

27 Berry for mature Christmas wine ? (5).

28 Common lake ? (4).

29 Stirring opus—at Hollywood Bowl maybe ? (4).

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